

Tower Hill Before The Rebellion

**A history of the small Virginia Plantation
before the Civil War**

With illustrations by the author

by

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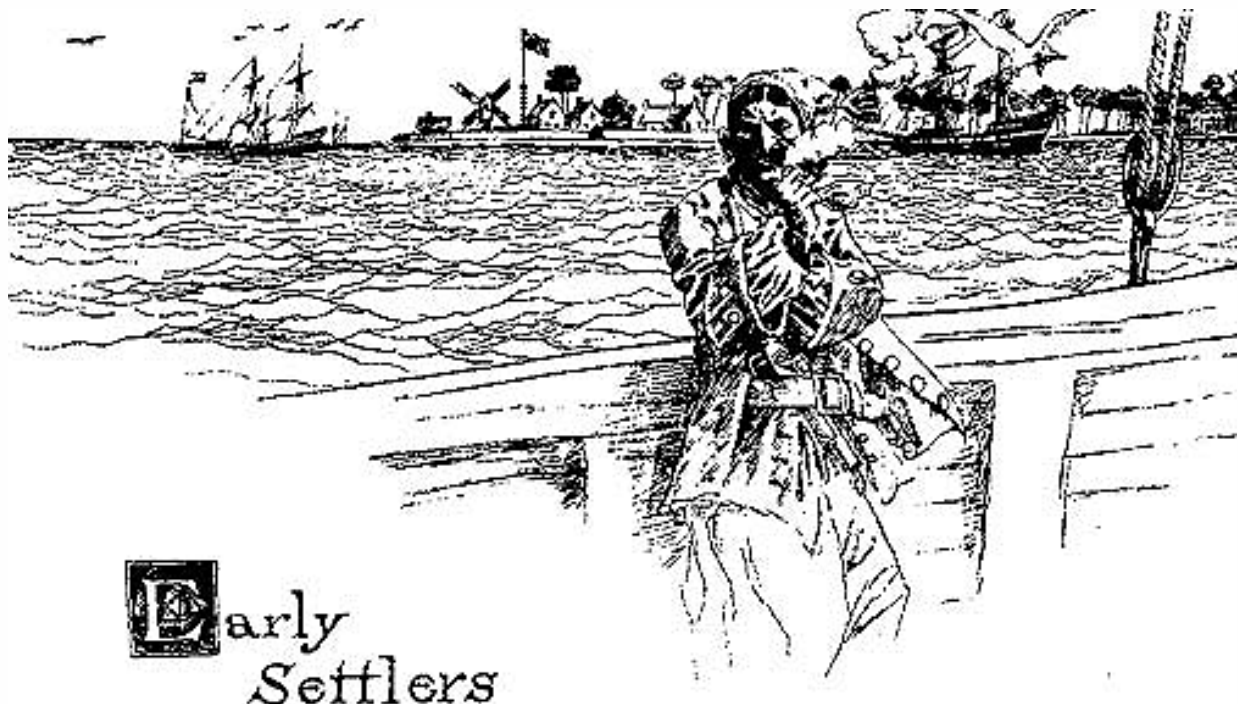
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Early Settlers

Before taking up my subject proper, I wish to give a brief outline of early Virginia and the conditions under which it was [colonized. There is half a page missing here. Ed.]

The first settlers were composed of two distinct classes viz: those brought over by the company; those who came as officers of it and those who paid their way. The first class were known as servants of the company they were enlisted for a term of five years, were brought over and supported by it, and were practically under martial law. At the end of their terms they were set free and received one hundred acres of land each. The officers of the company and a few others received grants of land by way of favor, a system that was so much abused in after years as to cause grave discontent, and was one of the grievances that ultimately led to Bacon's rebellion. The remainder of his class, subsequent to 1609, acquired lands by the importation of emigrants, receiving for each person so imported (including themselves and families) fifty acres per capita (by the head). Persons brought over in this way were known as indentured servants, (from the indentured instrument signed by them) and the land obtained from their importation, as well as their service until their passage money was worked out, went to their importers, they becoming in reality the importers bondsmen or slaves. Indented servants had no voices in elections - If they ran away they were branded upon the cheek with the letter R, whipped, and sent back to serve double time.

They did every class of work and could not marry without their masters permission. Some of these indented servants were prisoners of war, some criminals, and were bought in England by the importers; the practice however was soon stopped. Nearly all the lands of tidewater Virginia were acquired in this way (the favor grants being comparatively small during the infancy of the colony); the purchase of land from the company was only permitted in later years, and after tidewater Virginia had been pretty well settled [*]. The lands were cultivated by indented whites, but, as their terms of service expired, black slaves were introduced to fill their places, and the freed whites worked for wages, rented lands from their old masters on shares, or purchased from them small farms.

[*] *Hennigs statutes. (more unreadable)*

Thus a peasantry (or as their dusky successors dubbed them, a poor white trash) sprung up. They exist today, their little farms clustering around the great plantations like mortar and small stones around the great stones of a wall. As years rolled on, these peasants continued to rent from the planter, thus becoming, generation after generation, his hereditary tenants and he their feudal lord.

In early writing and legal documents, the distinctions between classes were defined by the term servants of the company, indented servants, and planters; the latter class is again subdivided into planters and old planters. An old planter, according to William Waller Henning (the best existing authority upon the subject), comprehends none other than those who were in the country at the last coming of Sir Thomas Gates.

Thus we see from tidewater Virginias very mode of settlement, and at an early date, class distinctions were clearly defined socially and legally; and that the institutions growing out of this settlement, were preserved until the rebellion (1861) and are even now but slowly yielding to the new order of things.

The laws of the company forbidding the purchase of land and allowing it only to be acquired in lots of fifty acres had a further effect upon the settlement of the colony and its social laws. In order that a wealthy Englishman might obtain the labor to cultivate his lands, he must import several persons; and this was profitable too, as he thus acquired both land and laborer. He was also accustomed in his

old home to a large retinue of servants, for each of which, as well as his laborers, he received fifty acres of land. The result of this law was that the early planters obtained large tracts, and consequently lived some distance apart.

Hence was born an almost feudal system, and each plantation became a complete community in itself and supplied most of its own needs, importing only the luxuries.

The size, consequently the isolation of the plantations prevented their owners from mixing with the world and keeping pace with it, so they remained almost unchanged in habits, speech and customs until the era of railroads, and even now those sections which are remote from the great public highways still retain the delightful primitiveness of the 17th century. So, in certain parts of tidewater Virginia, we find the same old plantations, owned by the same names that obtained the grants for the lands, surrounded by small farmers whose names were on the indentures that acquired the grants 250 years ago. Growth followed, not change.

They were simply a society of Englishmen, of the age of Shakespeare, taken out of England and set down in Virginia. There they worked out the problem of lining under new conditions. But they were Englishmen still, with vices and virtues of the original stock, and Virginia was essentially what it has been styled, a continuation of England.

As I said before, the lands were first settled along the main water ways. As more settlers came, and the Indians were gradually driven back, the settlements extended farther and farther into the interior. In what is now Surrey and Isle of Wight counties the first settlements were along the James river, but very soon they had passed, first to the Black Water, then to the Assamossic Swamp, and finally to and across the Nottoway river.

The following is a description of a Virginia planter of the early 17th century; it is a compilation, every feature being taken from Henning and Beverly and appears to be quite accurate.

Houses are built of wood, protected by a palisade, and the windows have stout shutters, the palisade is prescribed by law. The interior is ample and conveniently furnished, but Virginia has supplied little. The furniture, the table service, the books, and almost every article have been imported from England. The books are not paper bound novels, but ponderous folios or stout duodecimos encased in embossed leather. There is Purchas his Pilgrimmes and the General History of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles which have recently appeared in London. Less pretending works are lying near the larger: Master Hamors True Discourse of the Present Estate of Virginia, and Master Stracheys True Repertory of the wreck of the Sea-Venture, which is said to have furnished material to Master William Shakespeare for his first drama of The Tempest. This excellent play writer is now dead, but yonder is the folio containing his dramas, collected by his fellow actors, Heminge and Condell, and brought over in the last ship. This Shakespeare was only a writer of plays, but his plays are entertaining, and will probably remain popular for years to come. The Virginia planters are fond of the drama, and Master Jordan, at Jordans Point, has named his house Beggars Bush, after the play by Fletcher.

Here is the smiling lady of the manor in a huge ruff, with high-heeled shoes and a short skirt, coming to welcome us, and behind her is her spouse, the hearty planter himself. He is a commander, and head of a hundred, so he wears gold on his clothes as the law entitles him to do (1621), others are forbidden that. His official duties are responsible ones. They are to see that all such orders as heretofore have been, or hereafter shall be given by the Governor and Council, be duly executed and obeyed in the hundred which he commands (1624). He is also a commissioner, or justice of the peace, to determine all controversies under the value of one hundred pounds of Tobacco. Thus the worthy who advances to meet us is military commander and civil magistrate, executive and judge of the little community; a royalist in sentiment, as everybody is, a Church of England man, and hearty hater of things papistical and of dissent.

He meets us with friendly smiles, and offers us the best he has: beef, bacon, a brown loaf, Indian corn cakes, strong ale and strong waters - there is no tea or coffee as yet. A pipe of Tobacco is also presented, and you are requested to drink it, which is the phrase of the time. Sir Walter Raleigh, you are informed, drank a pipe before his execution.

This Indian weed is a great solace. The proper manner of preparing and using it is to cut it upon a maple log, to keep it in a lily pot, which is a jar of white earth, and to light the pipe with a splinter of juniper, or, if you prefer, with a coal of fire in a pair of silver tongs, which are made for the purpose. The weed has had its enemies. In his Counterblast to Tobacco (1616), which is lying yonder, his majesty King James I writes: Is it not the greatest sin of all that you should disable yourself to this shameful imbecility, that you are not able to ride or walk the journey of a Jews Sabbath, but you must have a rekey coal brought you from the next pot-house to kindle your Tobacco with! But kings are not infallible, and the jus divinum gives no laws to taste. A thousand pounds of the imbecility-producing weed are consumed in England every day now, and in one year (1619), Virginia sent over twenty thousand pounds of it.

If you will tarry with him, the worthy planter tells you, he will show you some good sport. There are plenty of bears, deer and wolves, in the woods of the Blackwater and Chickahominy, and there is no finer divertisement than to tie a live wolf to your horses tail, and drag him at full gallop, never faltering in pace, until he is dead. There is a little danger now of meeting Indian enemies in the woods; the massacre, following the massacre, has quite cowed them, and the bloody onslaught of 1622, by the savages, was not so unfortunate, it will be good for the Plantation, because now we have just cause to destroy them by all means possible, and he was as good as his word, the necessity being gone, palisades were pulled down, heavy shutters were removed from the windows, and the planter was enabled to live in a style more in keeping with his tastes and his English training. Better houses also supplanted the wooden structures that he had dwelt in during the early years of his residence in the colony, for we are told that at the close of the 17th century Many gentlemen had built houses of brick, and also some stone houses, with many rooms on a floor but they dont covet to make them lofty, having extent enough of ground to build upon and now and then they are visited by high winds which would incommode a towering fabrick. The drudgeries were performed in offices detached, which, with Negro cabins, extensive stables, corn cribs, smoke houses etc., gave the place much the same appearance as that of an off-the-railroad plantation at the beginning of the last half of the 19th century.

And here the planter lived, son succeeding father generation after generation - The planter in his manor-house, surrounded by his family and retainers, was a feudal patriarch mildly ruling everybody; drank wholesome wine, sherry or canary, of his own importation; entertained everyone; held great festivities at Christmas, with huge log fires in the great fire places, around which the family clan gathered; and everybody, high and low, seemed to be happy. It was the life of the family, not of the great world, and produced that intense attachment for the soil which has become proverbial; which made a Virginian once say If I had to leave Virginia, I would not know where to go.

What passed in Europe was not known for months, but the fact did not appear to detract from the general content. Journeys were made on horseback or in coaches, and men were deliberate in their work or pleasures. But if not so rapid, life was more satisfactory. The portraits of the time show us faces without those lines which care furrows in the faces of the men of today. There was no solicitude for the morrow. The plantation produced everything and was a little community sufficient for itself. There was food in profusion; wool was woven into clothing, shoes made, and blacksmithing performed by the retainers on the estate. Such luxuries as were desired, books, wines, silk and laces, were brought from London to the planters wharf in exchange for tobacco; and he was content to pay well for all, if he could thereby escape living in towns. Almost nothing was manufactured in Virginia outside of the shops on the estates. Iron was smelted at Spotswoods furnaces on the Rappahannock, six hundred tons in 1760, but it went away for the most part to England to be fashioned into articles of use and resold to the producer.

The Virginia planter was content to have it so: to be left to live as he liked; to improve his breeds of horses, of which he was extremely fond; to attend races; to hunt the fox; to welcome everybody at his hospitable manor-house; to take his ease as a provincial seigneur on his patrimonial acres, and to leave his eldest son to represent the family in the family home. If this state of things nurtured pride and the sentiment of self importance, many virtues were also the result; the sentiment of honor, cordiality of manners, and an abounding hospitality. The planter was ridiculed as a nabob by his enemies, but he was also a kind neighbor and warm friend. He was brave, honest, and spoke the truth, which are meritorious traits; and under his foibles

and prejudices lay a broad manliness of nature which gave him his influence as an individual and citizen.

Social intercourse was on the most friendly and unceremonious footing. The plantation house was the scene of a round of enjoyments. During the winter, large numbers of the planters went to live in Williamsburg, the vice-regal capital; and here were held grand assemblies at the Raleigh Tavern, or the old capitol, where the beaux and belles of the time in the finest silks and laces danced and feasted. Or the theater drew them; for the Virginia Company of Comedians had come over in the ship Charming Sally, and acted Shakespeare and Congreve for the amusement of the careless old society. The youths passed on their fine horses going to prosecute their love affairs; and the poetical portion wrote love verses to their inamoratas, and published them in the Virginia Gazette. These poems, addressed to Chloe or Myrtilla, may be still be read in the yellow sheet; and the notices of society doings, and the grand balls at the Raleigh Tavern. Jeffersons early letters also give us a glimpse of the gay scene; of the scrapes of the college students, the crowded streets, and the dancing at the Apollo, in which he figured with his dear Belinda, and was happy [Cook]. And so in 1861, in certain remote tidewater districts we find him still living the life of his ancestors. His low rambling house is not near so large as it appeared to old Beverly more than a century and a half before [*], nor is it a very convenient or even an especially comfortable residence, for the halls are lighted by the broad front and back doors, which constantly stand open, as if in invitation to guests -and draughts- to enter, while the enormous fireplaces keep up such a rush of air into their capacious throats as to render tight windows and doors to the adjoining rooms impossible. It also has many queer features and contrivances in the way of huge chimneys attached on the outside, detached kitchens and store rooms; quaint brass locks, door bars, tall clocks and four posted bedsteads, feather beds etc., but after all it is picturesque, and never fails to fascinate the guest from whatever land he may hail.

[*] *The type of house described above is that of the interior of tidewater Virginia, and not that of the great water ways, and few, if any, constructed prior to 1720 are now standing; the old ones having been burned down or become uninhabitable by the ravages of time. Those along the water ways, where constant communication was had with England, were planned according to the fashion prevailing in*

the Mother Country when they were constructed; but those of the interior, where communication with the outside world was had at rare intervals, owing to the long stretches of sandy road that intervened, were modeled after their predecessors, hence were much more primitive. For instance the many of the mansions along the James are like English houses of the 18th century, while those in Sussex and Southampton Counties resemble English houses of the 17th century though both were built about the same time.

At the breaking out of the rebellion the planter was still waited on by numerous servants, and each member of his family had a nurse, maid, or body servant (valet) according to his or her age and sex, neighbors of the same name as of 100 years before were outside his gate, who relied on the head of the plantation for aid and advice - as did their indented ancestors. He still hunted the same woods with dogs of the old breed; but he had discarded the old silver-mounted flintlock, using instead a muzzle loading London Twist fowling piece; and his horses were just as carefully bred as of yore. He had a military title of course - For did he not fight at Chapultepec in 1847, as did his father at Lundys Lane in 1814, and his grandfather at Yorktown in 1781?

It would appear from the above that there was but little difference between the planters of 1700 and 1860, much of this resemblance, however, is superficial; for, except in speech and customs, the stock had fully kept pace with the times, and in education it had advanced beyond them. With great pride of birth and the sharply drawn social lines, their alliances had always been creditable, while the patriarchal system, which prevailed to such a degree, especially in matters pertaining to the familys honor, was a further guard against misalliance. We are constantly struck with this in reviewing the history of any of the old families of the State, no branches, for generations, being better or worse than another. The Blow family is an excellent illustration, and its uniformity in this respect would seem remarkable to one unacquainted with the history of the people of whom it formed a part. But the above only accounts for the descent of the planter, and leaves unexplained that something which has given a meaning of its own to the word gentleman as applied to men of the upper class in this section, earning for Virginia the sobriquet of Mother of Statesmen, and causing her sons to stand forth conspicuously in the history of the country, since ancestry, while it may do something towards making a mere gentleman, cannot evolve

a Jefferson, Monroe and Madison, Washington, Lee and Johnson; or produce unaided, for generation after generation, that courteous and cultured personage, known the world over as the Virginia gentleman.

This is shown by the fact that with the conditions that produced him, he has gone; and that the present generation is unlike him, having taken the traits from the great world and the march of events, instead of inheriting them from their fathers. We must therefore go farther than mere descent for an explanation, and examine into his education, training and daily life.

His studies began at an earlier age than with children of the present; at seven he was studying French and Latin, while in two or three more years, Greek was added to his course. When prepared, he entered William and Mary College or the University of Virginia - Schools that were modeled for young men of his position[*]. His fellow students were all of his own class, as only the wealthy could afford the expenses of college life of that era, and few besides the planters were rich. Here besides the classics and modern languages (French and Italian) he studied mathematics, rhetoric, logic, ethics, surveying, the sciences (or what little was known of them) and a thorough course of political economy and jurisprudence (for which a special diploma was given).

[] The school system in New England did not, and could not thrive in the state (Virginia) because it was out of harmony with the spirit and institutions of the people. The plantations were so separated, their assemblies of children was difficult. The spirit of caste was too strong to encourage the mingling of rich and poor.*

On leaving college he usually traveled for a year or two and then returned to his home to take up the more serious occupation of life, and to complete this education with reading from his ample and carefully selected library[*]. His days were then spent in superintending the working of his plantation, hunting and reading; thus his mind was stimulated and broadened, and his body was made shapely and strong by the exercise of the chase; while his manners were given grace and dignity by his pride in his blood, and his part of host to the throngs of visitors that constantly surrounded his table, gathered about his fireside, joined in the chase, and danced in his halls. Could such a life help producing such a race, strong and

graceful, dignified and learned?

[*] *Text books, some of which are in my possession and some at Tower Hill, with names and dates in them, show by whom and at what age they were studied and prove the above statements. While the old library books and their condition indicate what class of reading three generations of the Blows followed prior to 1861.*

That this life existed I know of my own recollection - That some of its fruits still linger on the tree, I can also testify, for George Blow, Robert Pegram, General Page and a host of others, still live to show what sublime simplicity and grace these conditions produced. But they will soon be gone, and another decade will bury with the past the last product of those seeds sown by The Company in 1607.

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Richard Blow, son of Samuel, was born at Tower Hill on the 17th day of October, 1746. When in his twenty -first year, his father died, and Richard being the only son, inherited in imitation of the English law of primogeniture, the lions share of his estate; receiving, besides the

feather bed, slaves, money, ring, sword, etc., 847 acres of land lying in Southampton, known by the name of the quarter [tc] all the profits that shall or doth arise from the partnership with Charles Briggs, and after the death of his mother [Martha Drew Blow], the Tower Hill Plantation, with all its stock of what nature or kind soever, together with one-fifth of the remainder of the estate. Thus equipped, Richard started in life as a planter, while Mr. Briggs continued the supervision of the business at South Quay as he had done during Samuels lifetime.

With so broad and well traveled a road before him, along which his ancestors had passed with profit and honor, one would have thought that little more could have been chronicled of Richard, and that he would have followed it to his end; as doubtlessly he would, had it not been for a certain Miss Kello, a County Belle, and, it is said, a young lady of great beauty[*]. Now Miss Kello -so the story goes- gave him just enough encouragement to raise hopes, but nothing more, and ended by jilting him. Whether this story is true or not -for neither Richard or Miss Kello have left any statements concerning it- one thing is certain. He soon lost interest in County Belles and County pursuits, since he shortly removed to Portsmouth, where he entered into partnership with a Mr. Milhado, a well known merchant of that City; nor did he again play the gallant until he was a middle aged man of forty.

[*] *The Kellos have been clerks of Southampton County, off and on, for over a century and a half, the position being held at present by one of that name.*

At the breaking out of the Revolutionary War, Richard Blow volunteered his services and on the 11th day of March, 1776, was commissioned First Lieutenant in the Forth Virginia Regiment, in the Continental Army[*]. Finding, however, that the colonies were much in need of vessels, and that he could better assist them with his ships, he left the Army, and on several occasions, rendered signal service on the seas, for which he received the thanks of Congress[**].

[*] *Historical Register, Officers of the Continental Army, Heitman.*

[**] *That he received the thanks of Congress, as stated above, is a deeply rooted family tradition, and his grandson, Judge [George] Blow, told me that he had seen it in print -he thought in a history of Thomas Jefferson, which he had in his library, and which he tried to find for me. Otherwise I have never been able to confirm this tradition.*

On the restoration of peace, Richard again turned his entire attention to his business and plantations. He now entered into partnership with Mr. Baker[*] of Norfolk, and was a member of several other firms in different parts of the State. Thus had Miss Kellos coquetry born its fruit and the representative of a long line of planters had become a merchant in earnest. As often happens however, the practice continues after the cause has ceased, so in the year 1785 Miss Kellos image had faded from Merchant Richards heart and we find him in London, buying furniture, carting his old goods and chattels to his plantations, and generally preparing his city house for the reception of a bride[**]. The wedding took place on Thursday, April 5th, 1786. His choice of a wife, as might have been expected from a man of his age and peculiar experience, was a wise one. The bride, Miss Francis Wright, was 18 years of age[***] and was not only a very attractive young person, but was endowed with a mind and character of no common order; she was the daughter of Stephen Wright and came of one of the wealthiest and proudest families in the State. They began housekeeping in Richards Portsmouth residence, which is described by Mrs. Emma Blacknall as follows:

[*] *Father of old Judge Richard Baker and grandfather of the present Judge Richard Baker of Norfolk.*

[**] *A less (or more?) romantic version of Richard Blows marriage is that he did not intend to marry, having selected his favorite nephew, George Briggs, for his heir, and only sought another from marriage on the death of that young man at the age of twenty-one.*

[***] Fannie Wright Blow was born September 25th, 1767 and died November 19th, 1838.

"The residence was a large white house with stone steps in front on which the old house dog, Spot would lie, a large porch in the rear looked over the river. The upper floor was divided into five bedrooms and there was a cellar under the house. The garden was so highly

cultivated that grandma used to say it was as rich as a mole hill. The wharf (just in rear of the garden) was a most fascinating place to children, as the large dark warehouses were filled with timbers, capstans, figure heads of ships long since wrecked, coils of rope; while piles of ballast littered the wharf. The ships came up in the dock when there was deep water. The staff of servants consisted of the cook, Isabel; housemaid, Mason; nurse, Louise; the clothes were washed on the farm. Limerick was the butler and kept the hall floor and mahogany tables [*] polished like glass -Limerick always wore a blue coat with brass buttons- There was a gardener, Hercules; Charles, Moses, Joe and Jim were servants (one of these made shoes). The housekeeper was Miss Betsy Trafton. The house was lighted by candles and on the two hall tables stood glass shades with candlesticks under them. My grandfather was noted for his hospitality and entertained many guests, it was said of him that his house was like a hotel, every one was welcome and the spare bedrooms were always occupied by company. The hall was large and extended entirely through the house. The parlor and dining room were also large, the former had cabinets for china built in the walls on each side of the broad fireplace. The kitchen was detached and were two in number, there was also a detached laundry and servants quarters, shoe shop and office. Just in rear of the residence and its out-houses was a grove of trees, and in rear of them was the garden, which was screened from the street in rear by a tall hedge; besides vegetables and flowers of many varieties, grew box trees, goose-berries, currants and grapes. The lot extended from Crawford Street entirely through the block to the street in rear, and from this street to the river was occupied by Grandfathers warehouses, servants quarters and wharves; London Street was on the left of the property.

[*] *Three of these tables are now at Tower Hill.*

In 1821, Castello and Garcia, two Spaniards, murdered a Frenchman named Peter Lagardette, and, in order to conceal their crime, set fire to the house. It was a wild, stormy night and the fire rapidly spread from house to house, and leaping the narrow streets from block to block, finally reached Richard Blows residence on Crawford Street, which it burned to the ground. Most of the furniture was saved, though much of the china, pictures and plate were destroyed. Richards grand-children, who were going to school in Portsmouth, witnessed the conflagration from the feather beds in the yard, on

which they had been placed.

By his marriage, Richard obtained a large addition to his already ample fortune, and speedily became one of the first business men in the entire country, his ships entered every port of Europe, besides trading with both the Indies, South America, the Coast of Guinea and the Barbary States, in many of which places he had agents. A glance at his business relations is not here out of place.

In addition to the Norfolk and Portsmouth houses - Baker and Blow and Milhado and Blow, where he held his headquarters and had his main warehouses and wharves, he had a store and a warehouse in Petersburg under the name of Blow and Barksdale, with branches in different parts of that section, one of which was at Charlotte court House under the management of Mr. Robert Rivers [*]; a wharf and warehouse at South Quay under the name of Blow & Briggs, a store at Tower Hill under the name of Blow and Scrammel, one at Jerusalem, Southampton county, and several in other parts of Virginia and North Carolina.

[*] *Robert Rivers grandson, Mr. Alex Brown, states that Mr. Robert Rivers (father of William C. Rivers) was born in Sussex and was a clerk for Mr. Blow. At the time that he was married, he was agent for Blow and Barksdale at Charlotte court House, he then went into the house of Donald and Barton, and, following the example of his former employer, he established store (or agencies) for the purchase of tobacco wherever there was a public warehouse, and made an immense fortune.*

Quay under the name of Blow & Briggs, a store at Tower Hill under the name of Blow and Scrammel, one at Jerusalem, Southampton County, and several in other parts of Virginia and South Carolina. Of his ships I remember reading most frequently the names of the Portsmouth, Hannah, Olive Branch, Industry, Charles Carter, Fannie, Eliza, Greyhound, William and Cloud. Of real estate he owned three plantations, Tower Hill, Blow's Quarter, Paradise



Of his ships I remember reading most frequently the names of the Portsmouth, Hannah, Olive Branch, Industry, Charles Carter, Fannie, Eliza, Greyhound, William and Cloud.

Of real estate, he owned three plantations: Tower Hill, Blows Quarter, Paradise Farm (on Paradise Creek), with their Negroes, buildings, stock etc., besides several tracts of land in Southampton, Isle of Wight, Southampton and Surrey Counties; seven houses in Norfolk, one of which was a large business block on Market Square, a good slice of Portsmouth and many hundred feet of wharf property in both of these cities. All of this is told over and over again by tens of thousands of old worm-eaten ledgers, bills of lading, drafts, letters etc., which cumber an old granary loft at Tower Hill, and although they have been burned and wasted for many years, one cannot take a paper at random from their midst without finding something interesting.

These old documents, neatly folded and tied in packages with red tape, but yellow with time and covered with the dust of age, recalls the old counting rooms that Dickens loved to describe, where shriveled clerks sat on high stools and scribbled all day with quill pens, or the dark counting room where sat the merchant prince of

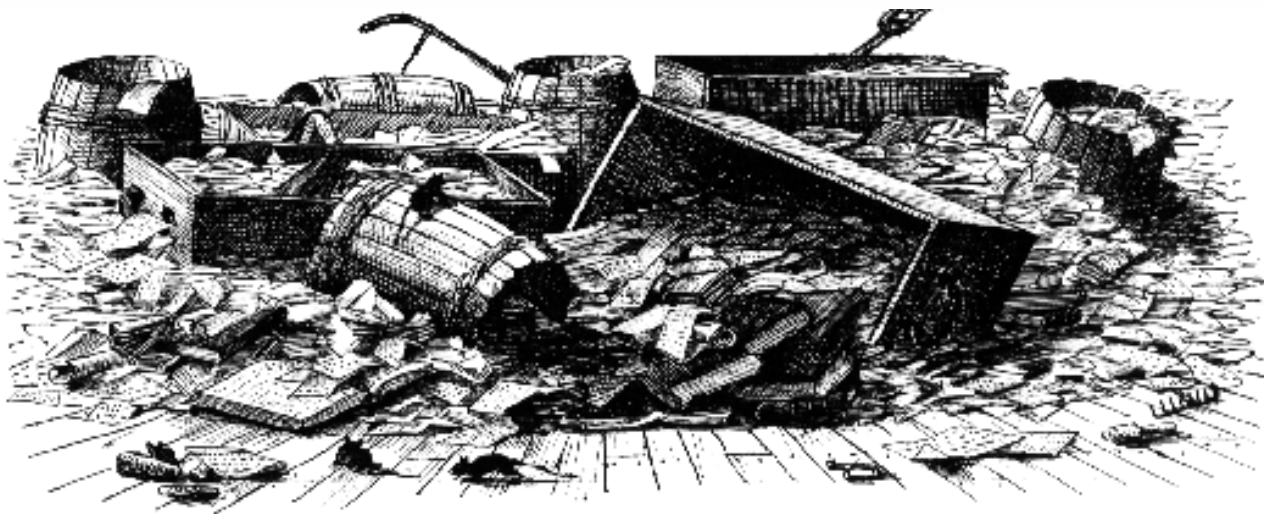
those good old days when ships really came in and pirates roamed the high seas.

Since I have taken an interest in such matters, I have been too much away from Tower Hill to examine these papers, and during my short visits, I have been too much occupied by other concerns to examine them. I have also been deterred by their dryness (they consist chiefly of business papers, accounts etc.) and the knowledge that they have been picked over by relic seekers for many years. However, while at Tower Hill for a few days a short time since, I nerved myself to the task and spent a half day among them, putting a hastily selected package into my pocket. Ninety nine out of a hundred that I examined were bills of lading, invoices, receipts, canceled bonds, drafts etc., but such as they are I append them, more to show how business was conducted a hundred years ago than for any interest they may contain. In looking them over I find a decision signed by Marshal, afterwards Chief Justice of the United States.

Powell and Matthews of Liverpool, in a letter of 1790, solicits patronage and gives commissions, quotations etc. (this letter is endorsed January 7th, 1791, saved from the Woolton.)

Brothers DeBerque of Dunkirk in 1803 complain that they are for a very long time deprived of his esteemed favors and hinting that a cargo of tobacco could be advantageously disposed of.

A letter from H. Goodair & Co. of Lisbon dated 1794 apprises him of the capture of his good ship Olive Branch, with eleven others, by Algerian Pirates; in which they refer to the miserable state and tormenting difficulties of the Captain of the ill-fated craft, and criticizes the United States Government for not



suppressing the depredations of this barbarous and petty enemy. They also deplore the loss of the cargo at a time when Indian corn commanded such high prices.

A letter of later date (which was filled with the above) from the unfortunate Captain Furnass of the Olive Branch, begs for ransom to set him free from his most abominable and cruel captors. A mishap which, he not unreasonably remarks, occurred in his honorable service. It is to be hoped that the good merchant saw the justice of this claim and paid the ransom.

A long rambling epistle - which I confess I have only had the patience to skim- dated 1784, in which Mr. R. Crew, a London Merchant, goes very fully into business questions of the day, and gives much information about mercantile usages, insurance etc. He also hopes that the Assembly would not be rash in passing restrictions on British shipping - In this connection he remarks that the present ministry seem disposed to do everything they can in order to keep up mercantile harmony between the two countries.

Two letters from General Henry Lee (Light Horse Harry, Washington's protege, and Robert E. Lees father) of 1796, about struggles for his residence at Stratford.

In the same year James Strange of Manchester writes about purchasing a vessel and speculates on the probable result of the British Treaty, the failure of which -he fears- will endanger American Shipping, and refers to a meeting of citizens held with the view of instructing their Representative in Congress.

Then follow a few documents of little interest; The transactions of Edwin Ford with Richard Blow shows the prices of merchandise in 1795, and gives many names still extant in Sussex and Southampton. Richards accounts current with his Liverpool agents, Lamb & Younger; that of Tower Hill with his Portsmouth Store. Bills of Exchange securing the payment of duties on importations, viz: -1786, for 752 and 74 Pounds (duty)- Exchange on London for 500 Pounds and 269 Pounds - On Philadelphia for 6000 Spanish milled dollars. A note on demand from South Quay, 1779, for 6097 Pounds 15 Shillings. There were several barrels of these notes and drafts and a few Powers of Attorney which were selected, I suppose, on account of their flourishing heading and generally imposing appearance. Next follows Bills of Lading, one of which, dated 1785, begins Shipped by the grace of God in good order and well conditioned by Messrs. Donald and Benton in and upon the good ship Portsmouth whereof is master under God etc., and ends with and so God send the good ship to the desired port in safety. This vessel was riding at anchor in the river Thames and was loaded with merchandise

The David and George sailed in 1791 bound for the coast of Guinea with 58 hogsheads of tobacco, 95 barrels of rum, 20 barrels of bread, 22 barrels of tar and turpentine and 3000 feet of plank, for the natives.

Richard transacted his business as follows: His smaller, or branch stores, were scattered about the country wherever tobacco was grown and seaports convenient. They were managed by his partners and agents, who bought up tobacco from the vicinity and hauled it to the seaports, where the large firms, Baker & Blow, Milhado & Blow, Blow & Barksdale, and Blow & Briggs had their warehouses, collected, exported to England, France, Spain, or wherever it was to be marketed; returning, his vessels brought back foreign wines and liquors, as well as silks, laces, mahogany furniture, teas, coffees, spices etc. In some of the African and South American settlements they had branch houses and dealt with the people direct. Mr. Milhando, a relative of the senior member of the Portsmouth firm, represented it in one of the African Colonies.

Payments were made by drafts, which owing to the uncertainty of navigation, were made out in quadruplicate, and sent in different vessels.

But the property which had weathered a 7 years war and 20 of commercial unrest caused by Napoleons wars, had reached its limit. For years a deadly struggle had been going on between England and France, and although America had wisely endeavored to preserve neutrality, she had been forced into an incipient naval war with the latter country, in which many merchantmen were sacrificed, but it was not until 1806 that the outlook became serious. In that year the British minister promulgated his blockade decree, shutting off all commerce with France and her Allies, which was followed by Bonapartes Berlin & Milan decrees, doing the like to Great Britain, her possessions and her Allies. This speedily provoked the Granville decree of 1807, requiring all neutral ships to touch at British ports and pay a tax, under penalty of seizure, which with the Emperors threat that he would consider vessels that obeyed this mandate as English, virtually blockaded the entire world, while the right of search even rendered her own waters unsafe for American vessels. In the meantime the United States was at last stung into activity, and Jefferson passed his celebrated embargo act, suspending trade with England and France and their Allies, and shortly followed it with the non-intercourse act, which forbid American ships to leave their ports at all. Then came the war of 1812, and for three years the battle-ships of Great Britain scoured the oceans in quest of merchantmen.

During all this time no vessel which braved the mandates of the old world was safe, and many was the good ship that left her American port never to return.

A letter in 1809, written by a Paris merchant Arthur Spear, advises Richard to keep his vessels out of European waters until Napoleon should raise his blockade, would indicate that Richard had not accepted the blockades, but was still carrying on a precarious commerce abroad. This was indeed the case, for his marine interests were far too great to allow him to calmly wait. His fleetest sailors were dodging from port to port in spite of cruisers, and some were captured abroad, while others rotted at their moorings at home. So stores were closed, counting houses shut up and clerks discharged; while vast warehouses of produce, ready baled and marked for foreign ports, lay moulding. In the meantime, drafts, notes and bonds fell due and creditors became clamorous, little merchants failed, and big ones, who had endorsed their notes, sold ship after ship, when ships had no value. Thus in a few years Richards colossal fortune had

dwindled sadly, and although still considerable, his property was chiefly in real estate.

In 1812, war with Great Britain being at last declared, and his age too advanced (66) to allow him to await its uncertain result and begin business anew at its close, Richard relinquished his mercantile pursuits (he had already turned his plantations over to his son [Col. George Blow] and was elected President of the Farmers Bank of Norfolk, Virginia [*] which office he discharged, with his accustomed energy and fidelity, until 1831, when he resigned, being then 85 years of age. On the 3rd day of February, 1833, death closed his long and useful career at the ripe age of 87. He was for many years the Presiding Magistrate of Norfolk County and filled other positions of public trust.

[] The old bank building is now owned by Mr. Newton and is situated at the corner of Granby and Washington Streets.*

Richard Blow was a man of the sincerest integrity, powerful intellect and well balanced mind. He possessed a wonderful capacity of labor and would have made his mark in any age. With all his business, public and private, he found time to devote to his well stored library, being a great reader [*]. His tastes seem to have been rather literary than scientific - he was a good linguist.

[] Many hundred volumes with his name in their covers are still in the old book cases at Tower Hill, although a great many have been removed since my recollection, or destroyed during the war. Among those that I recall are, sets of Shakespeare, Spencer, Johnson, Goldsmith, Lock, Addison, and works in Latin, Greek, French and Italian. All are handsomely bound in calf or sheep and are either library or pocket editions. I have in my possession a set of his Hume and a few others.*

Concerning the private life of this remarkable man we can obtain little from letters, since but a few of a private nature remain, I shall then quote from those who knew him personally. His granddaughter, Mrs. [Emma Blow] Blacknall, who lived in his house for more than 20 years, describes him as follows:

"1816 - When I was a child of four years of age, I was sent to live with my grandparents in Portsmouth, Virginia. My father and mother lived at Tower Hill, a country house, where there were no schools or other advantages, and their little children were sent away, as soon as they were old enough, to be educated. As I was the only girl in the family at that time, I saw more of my grandparents than the other children, for I could not play with the boys in their active out-of-doors sports, and was fond of sitting by my grandfathers side, and loved to hear him talk of the days when he was young.

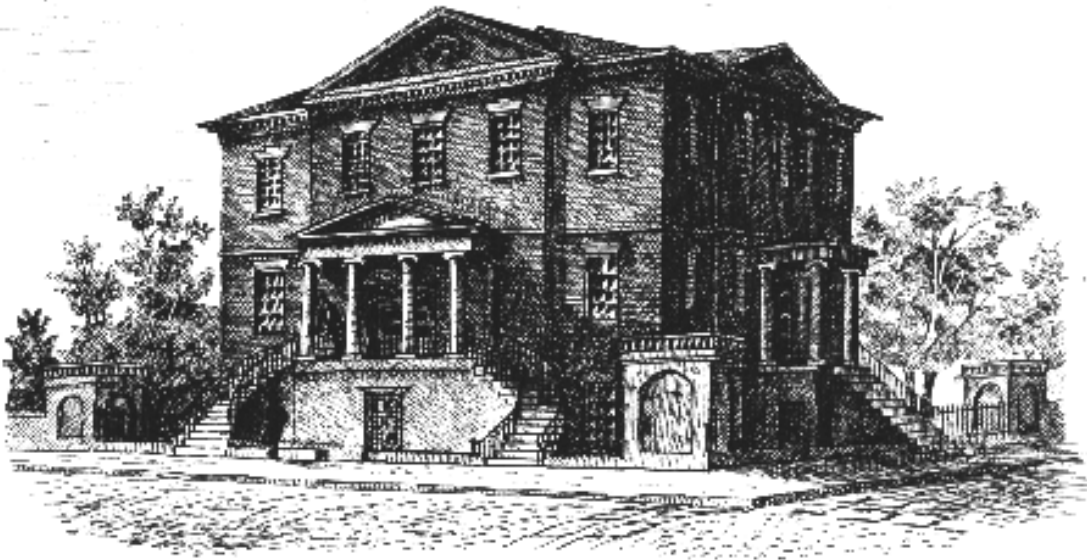
"As I remember him then, he was in appearance very stately and dignified, six feet in height, with athletic figure and broad shoulders. He had iron gray hair, worn in the fashion of the day, in a queue tied with black ribbon. He wore knee breeches, long black silk stockings, low shoes with buckles, and ruffled shirt front. These ruffles were of the finest thread cambric, and always most carefully laundered and crimped. For full dress he had shoe buckles set with brilliants. He was at that time President of the Farmers Bank of Norfolk, and went over to the bank every morning, returning at three oclock. Every Saturday he went to his farm on Paradise Creek, which was a pet place with him, and noted for its fine fruit and vegetables. His boat, with a crew of four men, would leave the wharf on the Elizabeth river, at the rear of his house, and soon reach the plantation. There he had quite a settlement of Negroes, and a well cultivated farm and orchard. The nectarines were considered especially fine. He had a horse, kept for his own use, called Philosopher, which was driven to a top buggy. His old house dog, called Spot, was a great favorite with him.

"He was very fond of reading, and the mahogany bookcase, now at Tower Hill, was filled with his favorite books, and always kept near his writing table. He would never allow games of cards in his house, and even the children were forbidden to play with them. Perhaps the following incident, related by him, had something to do with his aversion to cards. When he was a youth, he was sent by his father to the County Court House on business. He had with him sixteen pounds in money. He met with a party of sporting men, who enticed him to play cards, and won from him his sixteen pounds. This experience convinced him of the folly of gambling, and he was never tempted to indulge in it again as long as he lived.

"In his youth, he was a keen sportsman, and spent many days hunting, often in the company of Indians who guided him in the pursuit of game, through the forests of Southampton County. He told me of being fond of the violin, and owning a fine one. But on one occasion, annoyed by the playing of a companion, who was staying in the house, he remarked (in an impatient moment) to his old servant Nanny, that he would the old violin was in the fire. Nanny took him at his word, and the first opportunity burned his precious instrument, much to his disgust.

"He often spoke of his services during the revolution. At the battle of Great Bridge, 1777, he was sent to carry important dispatches, with orders to impress horses if necessary. Having need of a fresh horse, as his own was broken down, he tried to take one from a farmer, who stoutly resisted as it was a fine animal, but calling out In the name of the Republic, he sprang on the horse and galloped off. On his return, he restored it to the owner. He left the Army and served the Government by bringing supplies to the country in his ships.

"He made several voyages in his own ships. Before the embargo, Norfolk and Portsmouth had a large trade, and he, with the other merchants, was very prosperous."



Old Farmers Bank, now the Public Library.
Granby and Washington Streets
Norfolk.

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The Nottoway Indians

At the beginning of the 17th Century, that part of the low grounds nearest the present Tower Hill house was the most important spot for many miles around, for on it was situated an old and populous Indian village where the King of the great Nottoway Nation held its court;

there, for more years than I can guess, his warriors tranquilly smoked their peace pipes, hunted the deer amid the dark forests; or, painted and bedecked, sallied forth to fight their neighbors, while their squaws tilled the soft loam and raised tobacco and Indian corn.

But a day came bringing strange visitors across the river from the north, and the sons of the forest found that their arrows, with heads of flint, and bows of hickory, availed them little against the firelocks of the invaders; so they fell back to one stronghold after another, until, of all his ancient domain, the King of the Nottoways reigned over only a few miles of territory on the Assamossic; here a handful of his subjects built a village and were allowed to live in peace.

All did not, however, follow him to his new Capitol, for several families, preferring to live near their old homes, remained among the settlers and might have been found scattered about the country until the end of the 18th century. It was some of these, it was thought, that repaid the old debt of vengeance to the occupiers of their villages by burning down the Blow mansion on Tower Hill. When the settlers, having pushed their way from the James, found themselves across the Nottoway, the Capitol of the Nottoway Indians at once attracted their attention, for it was unencumbered by the heavy forest that covered the entire country and was already under cultivation; so the Indians were driven out, and old Richard Blow, having imported a sufficient number of emigrants to give him a legal title to it, took possession, perched a house on the neighboring high land and named the entire tract Tower Hill.

That the Nottoway Indian village was large and ancient there is abundant proof, for, although its site has been plowed for two centuries and its relics carried off during all those years, even now, the plowman, on returning from a days work in his field, fills his pockets with arrow and spear heads, which his plow has turned out, for his little pickaninnies to play with at home. I have enclosed a few of these relics of the oldest Indians in Virginia; at Tower Hill there is an old stone bowl, plowed up from this ancient Thebes, filled with them and containing also a few stone axes.

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Tower Hill

A large Virginia Estate in these days was a little empire, the mansion house was the seat of government with its numerous dependencies such as kitchen, smokehouse, workshops and stables. In the mansion, the planter reigned supreme; his steward or overseer was his prime minister and executive officer; he had his legions of house Negroes for domestic service and his host of field Negroes for the cultivation of tobacco, Indian corn and other crops and for outdoor labor. Their quarters formed a kind of hamlet apart composed of various huts with little gardens and poultry yards, all well stocked, and swarms of little Negroes gamboling in the sunshine. Then there were large wooden edifices for curing tobacco, the staple and most profitable production, and mills for grinding wheat and Indian corn, of which large fields cultivated for supply of the family and the maintenance of the Negroes.

"Among the slaves were artificers of all kinds, tailors, shoe makers, carpenters, smiths, wheelwrights and so forth, so that a plantation produced everything within itself for ordinary use. As to articles of fashion and elegance, luxury and expensive clothing, they were

imported from London; for the planters on the main rivers, especially the Potomac, carried on immediate trade with England. Their tobacco was put up by their own Negroes, bore their own marks, was shipped on vessels that came up the river for the purpose and consigned to some agent in Liverpool or Bristol with whom the planter kept an account. The Virginia planters were prone to leave the care of their estates too much to their overseers and to think personal labor a degradation. Washington carried into his rural affairs the same method of activity and circumspection that had distinguished him in military life. He kept his own accounts, posted up his books, and balanced them with mercantile exactness.

Such is Washington Irving's description -carefully gathered from old records and traditions- of a plantation of colonial times, which he remarks is a style of living that has long since faded away. Had he been a Virginia, he would not have made this mistake; he would have known that hidden away behind great forests of pine, many a plantation, the counterpart of that described by him, still existed. But he is in error in another particular: Washington's business methods and attention to detail instead of being an exception to the average Virginia planter, is a very true picture of him; for no man without these qualities could have managed a large Virginia estate, nor could he have left it to overseers, as Mr. Irving thought, for they were generally ignorant men and lacking both the capacity and interest for such a task.

Mr. Irving could therefore have shut up his musty diary, replaced the faded red tape on the old letters, and, boarding a south bound train, stopped at a small station in Tidewater, Virginia; gotten into a rumbling old carriage and, after a drive of fifteen or twenty miles, alighted in the very heart of the 18th century, where he could have drawn George Washington from life, for the host that would have welcomed him with old fashioned courtesy would have filled every requirement for the portrait. Tower Hill would certainly have served his purpose; forty miles from the nearest town, twenty miles from a railroad and six miles from the post office with its weekly mails, it was as freshly colonial in 1860 as was Mount Vernon one hundred years before. In fact I have often marveled at the resemblance of the picture drawn by him and the life in Sussex as I remember it. But I am beginning in the middle of my story, so I will go back, and before entering on its life, give a brief outline of the history of Tower Hill.

The land which is now known by that name was first owned by the Indians and since by the Blows, who obtained it from the London Company, cleared, settled, and named it. The earliest information on the subject would indicate that it was acquired by [the first] Richard Blow in the 17th century and transferred to Samuel Blow about the time of his (Samuels) marriage. Here, after the custom of the English gentry, he reared his large family of children, hunted the fox, visited and entertained the Drews, Exums, Kellows, Edwards and other County families in his old English Mansion. The original manor house was situated on what is now known as House Hill, the north end of Marl Hill, from which the plantation probably derived its name. The Marl Hill rising abruptly from the river to the height of 60 or 80 feet and viewed from below its almost vertical and scarred face might well suggest a Feudal Tower and probably recalled that well named Castle in London.

The plantation was situated partly in Surry and partly in Isle of Wight, but at the division of those Counties, it was thrown into Sussex and Southampton [*]. The house was burned about the middle of the 18th century and Samuel moved to Blows Quarter, a plantation of about 1500 acres in Southampton and about fifteen miles from Tower Hill [**]. Samuel Blow appears to have rebuilt the Old Tower Hill house on its former site and lived there until his death [1766] for he styled Tower Hill in his will [1765] the plantation on which I now reside. But his son Richard who came into possession of it on the death of his mother (her husband [Samuel] left her a life interest in it), having been crossed in love, sought forgetfulness amid new scenes and occupations, so moved to Norfolk and engaged in mercantile pursuits. Tower Hill, during his absence, was left in the hands of his manager.

[*] *To facilitate the collection of taxes, estates lying partly in two Counties are recorded in only one of them. Tower Hill, according to this custom, is entered in the Sussex records though it lies in both Counties.*

[**] *The Olde Place or Blows Quarter. The house was still standing, though in dilapidated condition, in 1876 when I last visited it.*

The plantation was located in a sort of peninsula, formed by a great bend of the Nottoway and Raccoon Swamp and was therefore cut off from the main road which ran across the isthmus, besides the house had again been destroyed by fire and the land having been under cultivation for many years, that nearest the house was becoming worn out. He (Richard) therefore embraced the opportunity afforded by a transaction between Mr. Henry Harrison and John Symms to make an addition to it of a thousand acres, which gave him the desired frontage for his store on the main road from Petersburg into lower Southampton County and North Carolina.

This addition was formerly a part of the old Hunting Quarter tract and was owned by Henry Harrison. Robert Harrison bought of Mr. Symms an imported stallion named Jupiter and gave his note endorsed by Henry Harrison; this note he failed to pay and the endorser was sued, judgment obtained, and 1000 acres received in payment. In November, 1774, Richard Blow purchased this tract from Mr. Symms for 950 and added it to the Tower Hill estate. His fathers old store was situated where the old public road (since deflected around the plantation) forked, one branch leading Southwest into North Carolina, the other connection Petersburg with lower Southampton County. Near the store he built and the present Tower Hill house.

Richard Blow was then living in Portsmouth, but during these improvements he spent much of his time at Tower Hill superintending the work. The selection of the site was a happy one, he placed the house at about a half-mile from the old one, on a hill which slopes gently in all directions, leaving a broad plateau at its summit; about this plateau grew several giant oaks which he desired to preserve as shade trees. On returning from one of his business excursions one day, he saw from a distance only one of his beautiful oaks standing. He spurred eagerly forward and just reached the spot in time to save it, though the axmen were already chopping its trunk. The Old Oak, as it is affectionately called, has well repaid its debt, for it has already sheltered five generations of his race since that day. It is the first thing that one sees on approaching the place and the last that fades on ones departure. The house that Richard built is not as spacious as those that preceded it probably were, though I imagine that is is built much on their same general plan, as it resembles others of its date in that section.

As he was a prosperous merchant, Richard did not intend to occupy his new house, but built it for Mr. Scrammel, his store partner and manager, to live in. The plantation however was large, old and rich, the slaves were numerous and the income from it considerable; besides it was the old homestead, so it was kept fully stocked and equipped.

In 1808 the store was closed and his only son George [Col. George Blow - Ed] took his bride [Eliza Waller- Ed] to Tower Hill and assumed control of the estate. Here his nine children were born. In 1810 Richard deeded the plantation to him describing it in his deed as left him by his father Samuel. In 1841 (Georges) wife died and the old place, so freighted with sad memories, became unbearable to him, and he moved to Norfolk, from which place he managed his three plantations, his wharf and other property. For 3 years it was managed by an overseer [unreadable]. William Niveson Blow, one of his sons, then assumed direct control of Tower Hill and at his fathers death in 1874, it came into his possession - he owns it still. And thus it has been handed down from father to son for over 200 years.

So much for its history, but its description is not so easy a matter. I wish I could paint it as I remember it a few years ago, for I am greatly attracted to it. It was the home of my childhood, the holiday place of my school and college days and my resting place in after years, as it had been to generations of Blows before me. It is hallowed by the births, marriages and deaths of those that are dear to me; and it was the only refuge of the entire family, with its many branches, during the civil war. No wonder therefore that every foot of its soil is sacred. It seems to have stolen a charm from an age that is past which the present does not possess, and brought it down to this matter-of-fact 19th century, that bewitches all that come within its magic spell.

What a grand place it was in its days of prosperity, with its teeming interests; its broad fields alive with slaves, its spreading lawns shaded by lofty trees, and its quaint old house with wide open doors - it is not surprising that I find my task difficult. Let us follow one of its many guests on his first visit to Tower Hill.

The mails are uncertain, they being carried from Petersburg in a wagon once a week, so the visitor, pursuant to a warning from his future host, has written two weeks in advance to say that he would be at the depot on a certain day. The letter has been received, and he finds awaiting him at the station a dignified old darkey, Little Jim by name, who escorts him to an old-fashioned carriage, upholstered in white and drawn by a pair of bays. His trunks are to follow in a cart which has come for the purpose.

Then begins a long journey of 20 miles over sandy roads, up red clay hills, through shallow brooks and long stretches of cool low grounds. Great pines interlock their branches over most of the road but here and there are passed large clearings where the wealthy planter's house, surrounded by a grove of trees, may be seen a half mile or more from the road; or a smaller clearing, with log or frame house near the road, from the door of which stare a dozen white-faced, white-haired children - the poor white trash.

In about three hours the carriage stops and a gate is opened, and the visitor sees over field of corn a mass of roofs and chimneys, a large cluster of trees and a tall oak towering above all like a mighty ball; it is Tower Hill and the Old Oak. The gate is closed and he enters a long lane lined on each side by tall cedars, passes over a green lawn and his journey is done. He is then assisted to alight by his host, taken to the dining room, and refreshed by a mint julep, peach and honey, or hot apple toddy, according to the season. This ceremony being over, he is informed that he is in Liberty Hall where everything is at his disposal. He at first fears that time will drag, but soon finds his apprehensions are groundless. There is an excellent library, and even in the beautiful days that are so common in this climate, one is tempted to remain indoors to examine it. The old leather bindings hint at something curious, while other shelves are filled with modern works, and tables are strewn with magazines and newspapers - a week or two old it is true - but he soon becomes accustomed to being a little behind the times.

After examining the library and mapping amusement for more than one rainy day, and having enjoyed the curiously built house with its primitive furniture, the guest - if he is the right sort of man - is ready for the more serious sports of the chase. He must make his selection now, for if it is Autumn, nearly every kind of hunting is in season.

The program is usually deer hunting in the forenoon; a mint julep, dinner, pipe, book and a nap; and quail or squirrel hunting in the afternoon.

Supper is served at about eight oclock during which the days doings are discussed and the marvels of the hunts related - All the men are hunters, and the ladies relatives of hunters, so it is a point of etiquette never to interrupt or smile at the most tiresome or astounding narrative.



When the hour for rest arrives, the guest is shown to his featherbed, where, with lamp on stand and book at his side, he reads or ponders over the events of the day. He at last falls asleep and dreams that time has rolled back in its flight; that stocks, bills, patients or clients never existed.

So the days pass without note, one enjoyment trading lazily on the heels of another, until his holiday is spent. He has become a part of the family and will be sadly missed after these days of informal familiarity. His trunks are gone and two or three hours afterwards, he is saying goodbye. He gets into the old carriage again and, amid a shout of goodbyes, sinks back and wonders why the old place and its people have become so dear. In three hours he is awakened from his reverie by little Jim, who is holding open the door of the carriage, while the railroad whistle warns him that he as come back to the 19th century with its toil and strife.

Do I overdraw this picture? No. I have seen it too often to be mistaken; I have seen the hardest and most cynical business men unbend, and their stifled better nature spring to life once more under these sympathetic influences until they become like boys in their gaiety and abandon.

Such is an autumn program; that of the summer and winter are somewhat different. In the summer, little hunting can be done so the morning amusements are usually fishing or possibly a ramble through the semi-tropical woods; of these, fishing is the most popular and may be indulged in either the river or the mill-pond. If in the river, the

fishermen proceed on foot, attended by a Negro carrying poles and bait. A walk of twenty minutes brings them to its cool banks and here under the shade of great hickories, gums and cypresses, they cast their lines in still pools, near the banks which are hedged in by fallen trees and debris, catch two or three fish and move to another. By noon all are hungry, and they return to the usual mint-julep and spend the afternoon reading or sleeping under the shade of the old oak, lulled by the droning cry of the locust.

The evenings are spent sitting on the porch or lawn, talking or listening to the song of the mocking bird and the melancholy cry of the whip-o-will and the white-oak-and-willow while the occasional hoot of an owl is heard from the low-grounds a mile distant. But as the night advances and he has retired to rest, all sounds cease but the call of the mocking bird which grows fainter and fainter as sleep steals on, when it mingles in the dreams until the sun rises over the tree-tops of the low-grounds, streams through the open window, and a whole tribe of feathered songsters take up the chorus and warn the sleeper that another day of lazy enjoyment has begun.

The winter amusements are more active, an early breakfast, a scamper over hill and dale after the fox, and a turkey or duck hunt in the afternoon. In the evenings the young people form a circle around the big blazing fire and tell stories or read aloud (it always seemed wonderful to me how easily the conversation flowed and how little we seemed to tire each other at Tower Hill. As for me, I never could talk so brilliantly anywhere else) while their elders played a rubber of whist in the dining room; sometimes, if several guests were present, a play would be selected and rehearsed night after night, but usually the old spinet and a violin would furnish music for a dance.

The greatest times however were at Christmas - For weeks before, preparations were begun so that all labor would be over and the holiday could be enjoyed by young and old, black and white alike; the mistress of the house and the cooks were busy making and icing cakes, pies, jellies and all sorts of sweets to last a fortnight, the house was decorated with holly and mistletoe, all the men on the plantation chopped wood as if their lives depended on it, making the forest ring with their songs, for it was not work, it was Christmas and Christmas as come-ing was their watch-word.

All the wagons, both ox and mule, were engaged in hauling wood to a great pile where more choppers cut it into proper lengths - 4 feet for down stairs rooms, 3 feet for office, 2 feet for upstairs and 8 feet for the kitchen. A few days before the great day, 3 or 4 mule wagons would start for Petersburg and on the third day return laden with everything needed for the holidays: presents for all, black and white, toys innumerable for the children, groceries, confections, and great boxes of fireworks - for in Virginia Christmas was Christmas, Thanksgiving, and 4th of July all in one. [*]

[*] *Little notice was taken of Thanksgiving day and 4th of July in the rural districts of Virginia, they were conceived after its time, and had never taken root among its customs.*

On Christmas eve a great bowl of eggnog was brewn, the entire family sitting around, some whipping the yolks, some the whites, some stirring, some pouring the brandy in a fine stream while it is rapidly stirred by others, whilst the remainder aided with suggestions and forecasts of the morrow. Then, all having drank one or more glasses, they hung their stockings, said good night, and retired to rest.

At midnight the sleeper was awakened by a low boom that broke on the still air and awakened numerous echoes from the dark pines, another and another is heard, right and left, some far some near, while all the dogs great and small, for miles around, set up howls until the woods ring again and the County is awake and Christmas has come. They were Christmas guns.

Bright and early all were astir, stockings were opened, the glass of eggnog by each was drank, and the greetings of Christmas gift Mars William; Christmas gift Miss Lawinia fills the air and the Negroes form a procession leading to the dining room door to greet the old Marster and Missus and little Marster and little Missus and receive their presents, and the men a dram, for which each returned a toast. Breakfast is eaten amidst the wildest excitement and the gentlemen mount for a Christmas hunt (everything that is done at this season is so named).

Ordinary fox hunts are comparatively grave affairs, the hunter and his friends start out and are possibly joined by a neighbor or two with horses and they proceed to hunt in a matter-of-fact business-like-way. But the word Christmas is a talisman that levels all barriers, and the

Christmas hunt is like no other. Everybody for miles around joins, some on horses, some on mules and some on foot. Here the planter mounted on his blooded hunter with his 25 fleet hounds, there the white haired, palefaced tenant, or small farmer astride of his crop-eared mule hawking his bow-legged cur on to victory, while the shining Sambo on Shanks Mare yells to his fice Boston. [*To ride on Shanks mare is to walk or go on foot, the shanks being the legs; the same as Going by the Marrow-Bone Stage or by Walker's bus. Ed.*]

And so they go, yelping, howling, shouting, singing and laughing, their very numbers giving reynard a chance that he does not have before three or four skilled hunters and a disciplined pack of hounds. But the fox is soon up - as is everything else within ten miles of this rollicking crew - and away they go, five score hunters, ten score dogs and one poor fox, and all with Christmas in their bones. But with all their noise they are too many for reynard, turn where he will someone sees him, and he is soon caught and another is started and likewise ran down. But two oclock approaches and all are tired and hoarse and hungry, so they adjourn to their various houses and sit down to the first of a series of Christmas dinners -for they have them for about two weeks - after which a faint attempt at a hare hunt is made by the younger members of the household and a supper at eight which no one can eat and a jolly evening around the great blazing Christmas logs. Laughing, talking and dancing end the day.

The next is much like the first except that a part of the fox hunters may, instead of returning to their homes, stop in with some member of the party for dinner, spend the night, and all hands are off early next morning to continue the hunt, dine, sleep and dance with another member of the hunt and move on, so that at the end of a week they have visited half a dozen neighbors and find themselves twenty miles from home. Parties are also given at the different houses in the County when neighbors for twenty miles around are invited, but at Tower Hill these invitations were rarely accepted, as the house was always full of guests at that season.

On Christmas night all the Negroes and tenants would assemble on the lawn and, amid shouts of delight, fireworks were set off and guns, loaded almost to bursting, fired. The Negroes too were enjoying themselves in much the same fashion as their betters. No work, except that absolutely necessary by the household domestics was

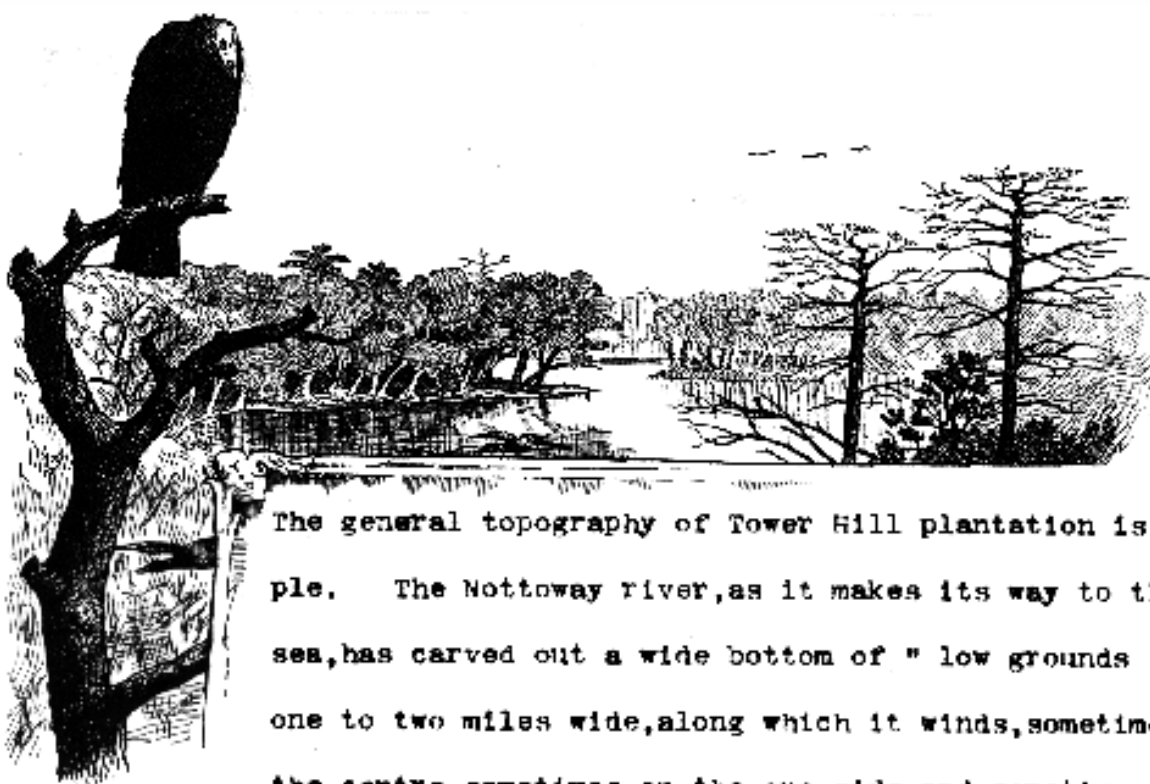
done, and their days were spent in hunting foxes, hares and squirrels, their nights in visiting, dancing and singing, while the later hours were beguiled with opossum and coon hunts, and the sound of the banjo was heard oer the land. So for two weeks every one was given over to enjoyment and good nature and every one was skilled in their occupation.

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The general topography of Tower Hill plantation is simple. The Nottoway river, as it makes its way to the sea, has carved out a wide bottom of " low grounds " from one to two miles wide, along which it winds, sometimes in the centre, sometimes on the one side and sometimes on

Topography

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sometimes on the other. When the river overflows its banks - which it does at least once a year - the larger part of this bottom land is submerged and is left, when the flood subsides, covered with a thick deposit of mud, from this deposit the entire low grounds have been built up, its soil is therefore very rich, and when it has been reclaimed by dikes or levees and cleared of trees, produces abundant crops of corn. In other places it is covered with a magnificent growth of lofty trees -cypress, gum, hickory, beech etc. - but owing to the floods that annually cover it there is little undergrowth.

The effect on entering the forest is striking; the air is damp and cool even in midsummer, for the sun's rays never penetrate the dense canopy of leaves 150 feet above, the appearance is inexpressibly dark and gloomy and the wild turkey, deer, squirrel, raccoon, beaver, otter and mink haunt its shades. The low grounds are bounded by ranges of hills which rise from them and go rolling back to the interior, reaching an elevation of 80 to 100 feet above the river level. The soil is usually light and sandy and is covered, where it is not cleared for cultivation, with great forests of lofty southern pine interspersed with every variety of semitropical tree, whilst above the leaves and moss that cover the ground a dense undergrowth and innumerable flowers are seen.

When the original land patents of Tower Hill comprised is not known, its boundaries having since undergone so many mutations from bequests, purchases and sales, but the central track has always remained intact. I shall therefore describe the plantation as it was (and had been a long time) in 1861; since the war, while it left its boundaries for several years unchanged, produced those causes which were to alter by slow degrees, not only the customs and manner of the people, but the very face of the country itself.

Tower Hill plantation embraced about 2700 acres of land - not including the mill pond -about 2500 [*]. It may be divided into three tracts: The home, the island and Butts, and the mill. The home tract began at a point about half to three quarter of a mile North of the residence and extended along the river to the fresh grounds, a distance of about two and a half miles; Butts and the Island began near the fresh grounds and extended over a mile and a half beyond, to the South branch or Raccoon swamp, above the junction of its North and South branches; from this point the mill pond extended about five

miles further on and contained about 2500 acres, making the entire plantation over 5000 acres; it was thus three and a half to four miles long and from three quarters to two and a half miles wide, while the mill pond extended seven miles back from the river.

[*] *There were two other plantations in the estate making in all nearly ten thousand acres, with their Negroes, stock, buildings etc., besides buildings and wharf property in Norfolk and Portsmouth.*

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The home place contained the residence and headquarters of the plantation, with the overseers, domestics, and artificers quarters, shops, stables, barns, storehouses etc.; here all the manufacturing for the plantation was done, for the place partook of the nature of both town and country.

Unlike the large western farms of the present day it consumed a large percentage of its products, manufactured what it needed, and sold only the surplus. The articles made in its shops, if not as economical as those turned out by machinery, were at least more substantial and lasting; labor was plentiful and artisans were skilled in every craft.

In order to accomplish this a most perfect system and organization evolved itself from the nature of things. This system was essentially hereditary in all branches of labor and thus the slaves became divided into classes and so remained for generations. In the trades the grandfather would direct, the father execute, whilst the son did the rougher work and learned as an apprentice. The children of field hands, over twelve years of age, became water carriers about the field until old enough to handle a hoe; those of plowmen and teamsters assisted in the feeding and care of the teams, opened gates etc.; those of the seamstress learned to sew and afterwards took their mothers place; those of cooks to do scullion work, wash dishes, peel vegetables etc.; those of spinners and weavers to prepare the threads for their parents; the son of the coachman became footman; while children of the house servants ran errands, polished the great brass locks, andirons, fenders, doorknobs, handles of shovels, tongs etc., kept flies off the table with long peacock feather brushes, and being constantly about their superiors, early acquired that sort of black urbanity that has made them the best of butlers and domestics the world over.

As the old servant retired, first to light work and then to total rest, his son, now fully prepared in his trade, slipped into his place; thus it was, that with a somewhat inferior race, all the trades were competently represented and work was done that we cannot but wonder at for its excellence.

The material - with the exception of iron, steel and brass - was produced on the plantation; cows, calves and sheep supplied leather; the vast forests the best of timber - oak, pine, cedar, locust, cypress, poplar, dogwood, birch, holly, maple, hickory, ash, cherry, gum etc. - growing in abundance; cotton was picked from the fields; wool sheared from sheep; straw furnished summer hats; of shucks were made doormats and from hickory withes were made baskets, and almost everything else from an ax-handle to a grist-mill was produced on the place.

The carpenters were excellent - one being a good cabinet maker - they erected buildings when necessary and kept others in repair, made plows, harrows, saddle-trees, tool handles etc. The cooper made all the barrels and casks for the quantities of vinegar, apple and peach brandies annually marketed, besides buckets, pails, tubs etc. for use on the plantation. The smith attended to the shoeing of teams, made the ironwork of farming implements, plows, hoes, spades, axes, shovels, wagons etc., repaired that of the mill, and even constructed locks, hinges and bolts - they also worked in tin and brass.



Storehouses, Smokehouses, Kitchen, Office, Granary and Saddleroom
The first building was built by the first owner and was called the Great House

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The Great House

Having glanced generally at its surroundings, I will now describe the old Tower Hill homestead or Great House as it was called by the Negroes.

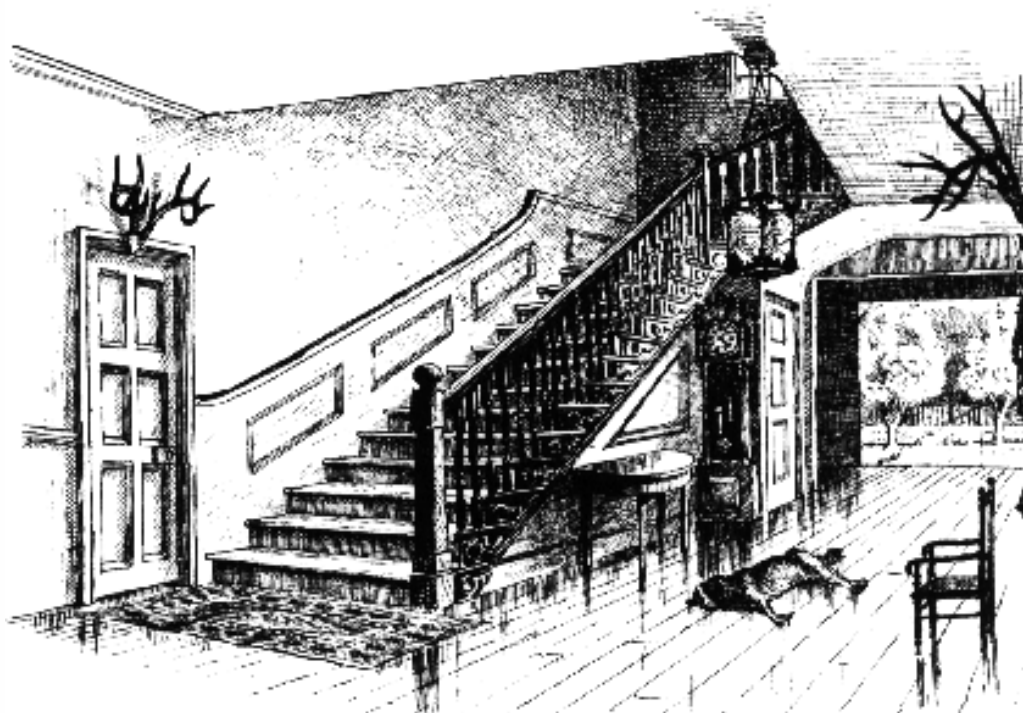
As I said before, it was built in 1775 (the old manor was burnt by Indians a short time before) by Richard Blow to be occupied by his manager at Tower Hill, it is therefore not as spacious as it would be had it been intended for his own residence. It was modeled after the style of architecture in vogue in Virginia about the beginning of the last century and before the fashion of long verandas, which came into use about the revolution, and was an evolution of the warm climate rather than an importation from England, as was the style of the earlier houses.

It was constructed after the substantial manner of its day, and nothing foreign was employed in its fabrication; the labor, as well as the material, being furnished from the plantation. Slaves felled the carefully selected trees, sawed, hewed and split them into plank, girder and shingle; dug the clay, molded and burnt it in brick; hauled, and roasted oyster shells into lime; and made every nail, screw and hinge that united the structure, by hand.

The general appearance of the house is picturesque though rather somber, its gable porch, supported on rounded pillars, its heavily ornamented cornices, dormer windows, massive brick underpinning and enormous chimneys, and the dark green mass of ivy, which, climbing to their tops, are spreading over nearly the entire structure, gave it an air of antiquity and recalled the rugged age in which it was reared. In front of the house was a porch, whose sides, face and pillars, from capital to plinth, was covered with antlers, resting on which was a promiscuous assortment of fishing rods, bait, nets etc. The house was entered by a broad double doorway, the doors of which remained opened during the day but were fastened at night by a large wooden bar, this precaution was necessary, not to keep out thieves -for the hounds attended to that- but to prevent these guardians of the night from sleeping in the halls. As for the Setters and Pointers, they had the freedom of the house day and night.

The halls - there was a front and back- ran entirely through the house, terminating in a doorway similar to that in front; thus, provided with openings at either end, they were always fanned by cool breezes, and became in warm weather a favorite resort of the ladies to sit and sew or read aloud; on hooks around the wall hung horns, game bags, powder flasks, shot pouches etc., whilst great guns, little guns and rifles stood in a corner.

A large room over 20 feet square was on the right of the hall, and one of about the same size was on its left, while the dining room - just in rear of the former - opened on the back



hall. This room was a somewhat larger than the parlor [*] and was lighted by four windows and had a southeastern exposure. One of its doors opened on the back hall, while the other communicated with a side porch in the direction of the kitchen and storerooms.

[*] *The dining room was not a part of the original structure but was added to it for [Col.] George Blows accommodation, when he decided to occupy Tower Hill. It was finished exactly like the remainder of the house and was apparently as substantially built, but in 1882 it showed signs of decay, so its walls were removed, and it was converted into a large porch. This is the only part of the house that was not perfectly sound when I last saw it.*

In one corner, The three steps led to a small landing with a window in its front and the doors of the china closet on its right; the whole formed a delightful little alcove and was a favorite play-house for the children.

In another corner, the old clock sometimes stood. It was certainly the Prince of hall clocks, with its great stature, musical voice and wonderful astronomical pole;

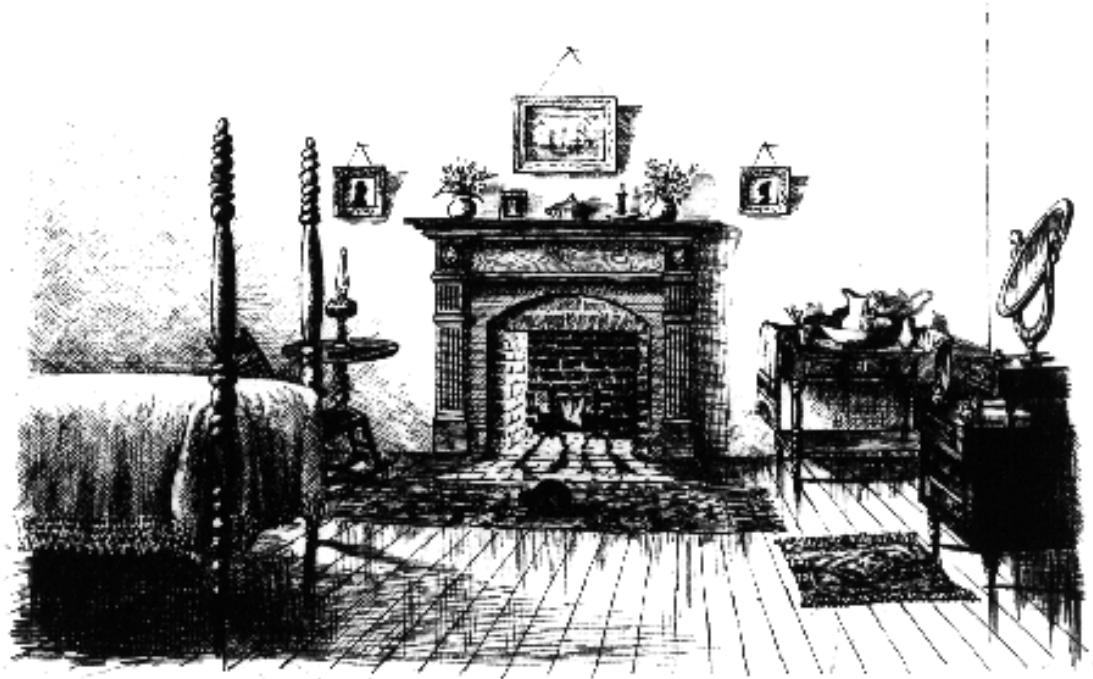


there was a certain elegance and dignity about it that impressed me as no other inanimate object has ever done, whilst its head - which resembled Goldsmiths schoolmasters - seemed to carry everything from the moon to an opera. It was by far the handsomest thing of the kind that I have ever seen, not excepting a very elaborate one at Tiffanys, which, by the way, I remember, cost a fabulous sum. The case was made of rosewood, most curiously carved and inlaid with brass. About the richly chiseled top above the face were three small dials, whose duties were to show the phases of the moon and the motions of the heavenly bodies. Its face was broad and kindly, measuring over a foot from ear to ear, and was supported on pillars of brass and wood. The door was of plate glass, which exposed the great brass pendulum and weights. Its chime was accompanied by music from a box inside which boasted quite a lengthy repertoire, and continued to play some time after the hour was told. The entire clock was about eight feet high. Of course such a nobleman had a history. I will tell it as it was told to me.

Pa, says the narrator, remembers perfectly his grandparents telling him the following history: A young Englishman took passage in one of Richard Blows ships and was taken sick on the voyage. On his arrival, he was carried to great grandpass house, was nursed by great grandma, and cured. He was much impressed by the kindness and hospitality lavished upon him and sought in every way to make some return, which however, he was not permitted to do. Soon after his return to England, the old clock (then new and of the latest fashion) was sent to Richard Blow, Merchant, to be unpacked and kept at his house until called for [*]. It never was claimed, nor could the consignor be traced, so, after much inquiry, great grandpa became satisfied that his guest had taken this delicate method of showing his gratitude [**].

[*] Mrs. Ragland has the invoice of the clock.

[**] *During the rebellion, the old clock got out of repair, nevertheless it remained for some time in its corner, but was at last put in a lumber room to get it out of the way. We children found and destroyed it. Its brass weights and pendulum are still throwing about the place.*



There was another valuable piece of furniture in the dining room; its history is so short and its merits so long, that I cannot resist the temptation of giving both. In the year of our Lord 1786, when the British had been disposed of and time and success had at last driven

the image of the Southampton coquette from Richard Blows heart, he determined to close his long bachelorhood. Since it was then rather late to present the lady of his choice with a young husband, he would at least give her new furniture. Now as that which adorned his house was hardly what is called modern, he boarded one of his vessels, sailed for London, and there purchased a houseful of the latest styles.

Among the various articles which he brought back with him was one which as been especially admired and for a which a deep affection is felt by the Blows, their kin, and such of their acquaintances as have an atom of gratitude in their composition, for there are few of them who have not regaled themselves at the side of the old dinner table. It is of solid mahogany, without varnish of any kind, and was rubbed with a waxed cloth for hours daily until it shone like glass; age has turned it as black as the hands that polished it, but so rich is its color, and so glossy is its surface, that it was never hidden by a cloth except during breakfast and dinner. It is made to fold or extend, and when its stretching limit is reached, a square and a semicircular table is fitted at each end, it will seat over twenty persons, ordinarily however it is sufficient in itself for the family, and the four end pieces are used as side tables. Its top and leave as well as those of its auxiliary tables are each made of a solid mahogany plank over three feet in width, without piece or splice, and no cleats or braces are used to support them.

More than a century has now passed since old Merchant Richard placed his mellow madeira before his friends on this table, since then it has been constantly in use, and probably not one week has passed that has not seen a guest at its side. It is still at Tower Hill, black with age, but as bright as it was when it reflected the smiling face and powdered hair of old Richards bride, and as ready to empty the larder to great and small alike.

The remainder of the house was furnished after the fashion of a day long past, though among its belongings were curious articles brought over the oceans in old Richards good ships or more recently imported by the three navy officers who married his three granddaughters [*].

[*] *When [Col.] George Blow brought his bride to Tower Hill in 1807, some of the old furniture was moved out of the house to make room for articles of a newer pattern and also for some of the old Waller furniture brought from Williamsburg, which belonged to the bride. Among the latter was the linen press that stands in the hall at Tower Hill and the large four posted bed in the main chamber. The two four posted beds and mahogany bookcases in the office came from Richard Blows house in Portsmouth and was some of the furniture that he purchased in England. It was sent to Tower Hill when his wife died. The three corner cupboards in the parlor and one of the bookcases and a washstand is of the old Tower Hill furniture and antedates the two bridal invoices of 1786 and 1807 and is of Samuels time or even earlier. The sideboard, some of the chairs and one of the bookcases came with George Blow in 1807.*

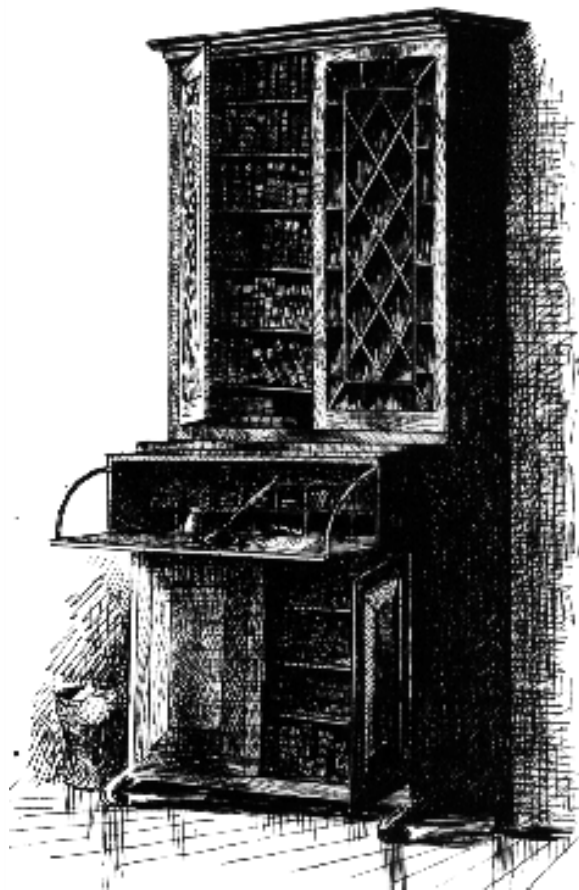
Across the hall were two rooms and adjoining the rearmost was a smaller anteroom, dressing room or closet, with a window looking northwest. All the rooms, stairs and halls, of the lower floor were heavily wainscotted to three and a half feet from the floor, and the ceilings were richly corniced. The mantels were fluted

and paneled and extended to the ceiling, the mantel shelves being about six and a half feet high and the fireplaces below, five feet wide, with brick hearths and faces, these latter were always kept a bright red by being washed every day with a red clay paste.

A broad low stair led to the second story which consisted of a large hall and two bedrooms. A cellar or basement extended under the entire house. It was well pitched, being about four feet above and three feet below the surface of the ground and was lighted by numerous windows protected by iron bars. The cellar

was divided into four rooms in one of which fuel was stored, the remaining three were kept constantly locked and were used as store rooms as follows: One for meal etc., one for liquors, and one for vegetables.

It is thus seen that the house contained only seven rooms and three halls, but they were all large, and the two offices giving five additional chambers in time of need. The number of guests that could be accommodated however could not be reckoned by the rooms, as each room contained two beds and I am afraid that unless they were very distinguished it was not unusual to pack them rather unceremoniously.



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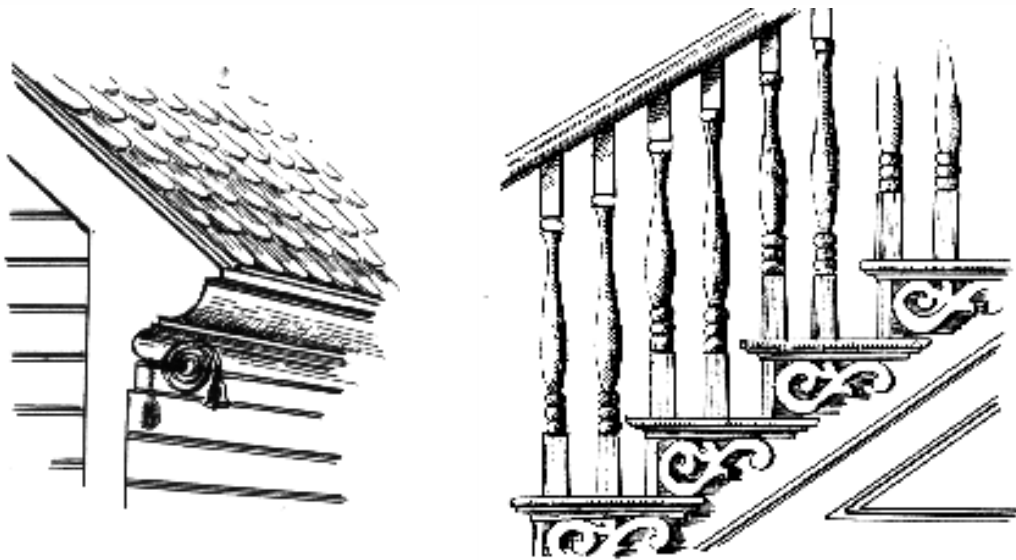


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So much for a general description of the old homestead, but it was so massively and compactly built, and so different from anything that one sees now, that I cannot resist the temptation of going into the details of its construction, if fact, they are to me the most interesting feature of the plantation and I never cease to admire that completeness which has left it perfectly sound while structures of brick and stone have crumbled to ruins.

The foundation is of brick, two feet thick, and extends four feet below the surface of the ground and is carried the same distance above, giving an eight foot wall, two feet thick; the cellar partitions are built in the same massive way; the chimneys (three in number) are of like material and contain enough brick to build a modern house, they are forty feet in height and eight feet by four feet at their base, at which size they are carried to twenty-five feet when they are reduced to three feet by four feet; the hearths of the lower floor are built up solid.

The framing, scantling and studding are of the best hard southern pine, perfectly clear, without knot or shake. The floors are of the same wood (quartered stock) and were so well seasoned that except where they have worn are as good as new, showing no opening or cracks. Floor joists six inches by twelve inches and every third one six inches by fourteen inches with tusk tenon in girders, all set two feet on centers, while the studding is invariably four inches by six inches with corner posts six inches by six inches, rafters six inches by eight inches and plates six inches by six inches, hickory pins are used throughout in framing; studding, corner posts and braces are all mortised and tenoned into both plate and sill; the sills and girders are twelve inches by fourteen inches; all the dimension pieces larger than six inches by six inches are hewn. Weather boarding is of one inch poplar, the edges fancy molded; the cornices are very heavy and ornate. Shingles of cypress are split, drawn and the ends rounded, all laths are split and only wrought iron, hand made, nails are used!



The interior is fitted throughout with high wainscoting terminated by a four inch tablet; mantles elaborately molded, fluted and paneled, and extend from hearth to ceiling; fireplaces broad and deep (five by four feet); chimney flues very broad; door and window casing deep and fancy carved corner designs; windows fitted with old fashion shutters and small panes; doors ornamented by large brass locks. The cornices of the ceiling are very handsome, they are a foot deep, elaborately molded and thickly studded with blocks or small corbals, each being separately chiseled and set with beading around base and back. The stairs are low and broad, nosing well molded, ornamental scroll work at ends, inner wall paneled and balustrades fancy turned.

When we remember that all of this work had to be done without machinery or any sort and by Negro carpenters, we can form some idea of the magnitude of the undertaking. So well was the timber selected, seasoned and fitted together, and so carefully was the lime slacked and plastering laid, that after all these years, not a joint has opened, not a wall cracked, not a floor has settled a hairs breadth, and it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the blade of a knife cannot be inserted between any two planks in the house.

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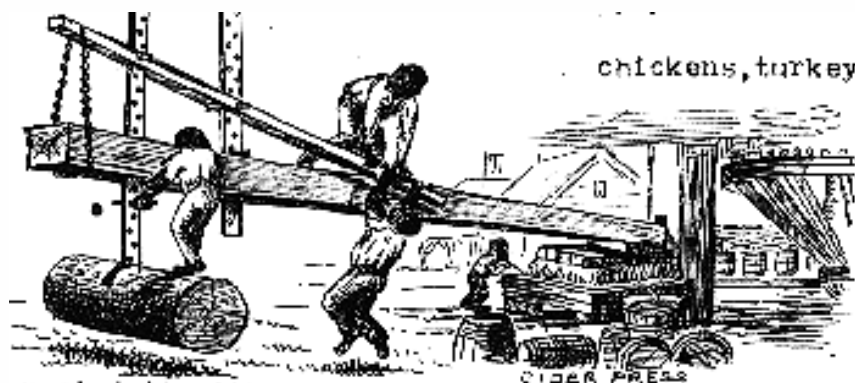
ut to return to the description of Tower Hill. The mansion was situated on a broad grassy lawn dotted with shade trees - oak, walnut, locust, mulberry, elm, catalpa,

But to return to the description of Tower Hill. The mansion was situated on a broad grassy lawn dotted with shade trees - oak, walnut, locust, mulberry, elm, catalpa, pear, cherry, plum, paradise, cedar, poplar, hickory etc. - and across it ran a neat board fence painted white. To the North of this fence lay the residence and two offices, and also the fronts of the kitchen, saddle-house, storehouses, smokehouses, and dairy, while in its extreme end was the overseers house; behind the overseers house, but off the lawn, was the tannery and tobacco barn. Two broad lanes gave access to the public highways about half a mile distant, one leading from the front and the other from the right side; one of these lanes passed the cotton-gin, cider-mill and apple and peach brandy stills.

Over the lawn grazed large flocks of milk white geese and such horses as were not in use, or strutted a half dozen brilliantly bedecked peacocks. South of this fence was situated the barn, carriage-house, stables, wagon-sheds, long rows of corn-cribs and shops, wash-house (laundry), brick-kiln and yard, mechanics and domestics cottages, and on its grass innumerable little darkey children played, while the less aristocratic members of the poultry yard and stables - guinea fowl, chickens, turkeys, sows and mules ranged over its face. A lane of about the length of the other two connected it with a road running to the more remote portions of the plantation, on the side of which was located the breeding lot for horses and fattening pens for hogs (the beef cattle and breeding hogs were in large pastures).

It is thus seen that this white fence was that line, real or imaginary, which divides every community - The aristocratic part of the little town was on its North, the business and laboring part on its South.

On each side of the front lane were large orchards of apple and peach trees, these covered about twenty-five acres, of the former there were six hundred trees and one hundred and fifty of the latter. A good yield of apple brandy for a year was fifty barrels which required seven hundred barrels of cider or two or three thousand barrels of apples. The apples were first crushed into pumice in a circle of wooden troughs in which two large, heavy, wooden wheels were drawn by mules. The pumice was then placed in the press and by long wooden levers (consisting of squared logs thirty feet long with a round log two and a half feet in diameter and twelve feet long, suspended at ends) the cider was squeezed out, after standing a fortnight it was twice distilled and high wines or new dip resulted, this fiery liquid was brought to proof with water, doctored with burnt fruit and sugar and became the apple brandy of commerce.



chickens, turkeys, cows and mules

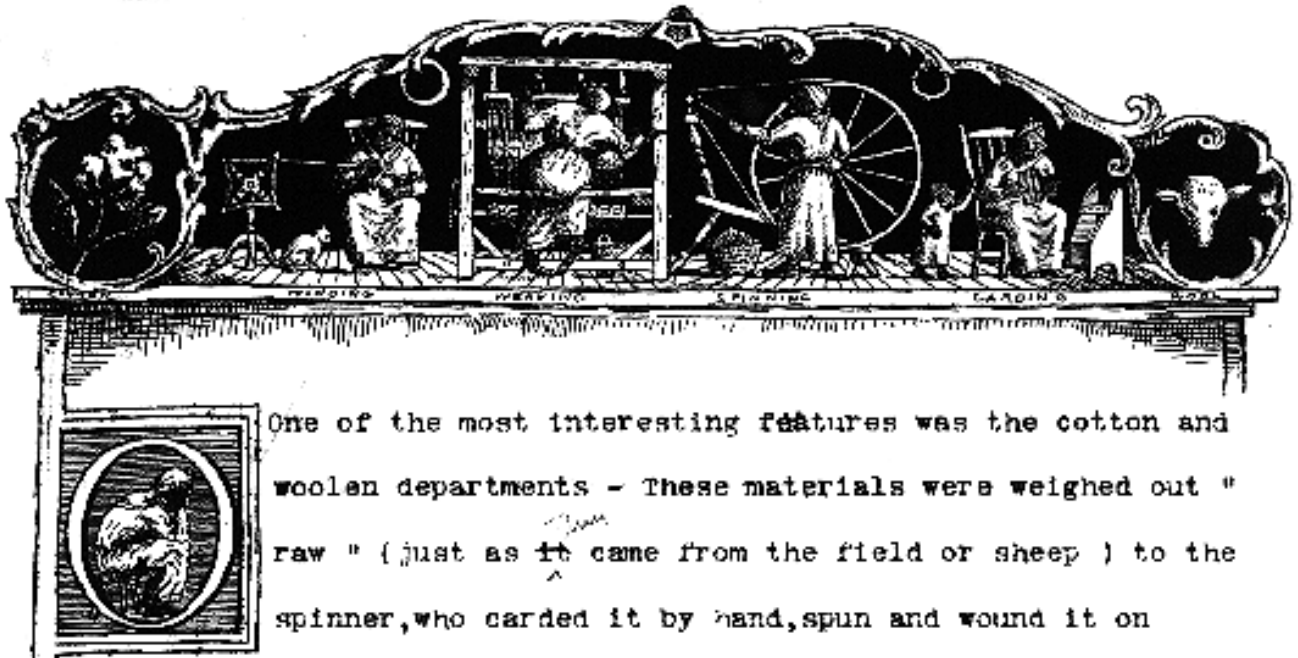
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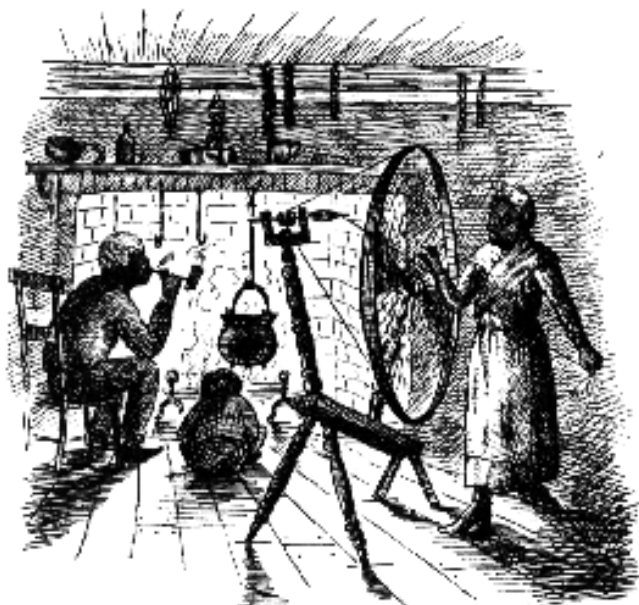
The old fashioned cotton gin was also an interesting piece of machinery and typical of the south. The cotton was picked out in the field, hauled to the gin and there ginned, i.e., seeds separated from the cotton; two mules pulling a lever around supplied the power to the gin above, the cotton was then collected and taken to an adjoining room where it was packed, as before two mules attached to the end of a large lever turned a long wooden screw and packed the cotton into bales.

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One of the most interesting features was the cotton and woolen departments. These materials were weighed out raw (just as they came from the field or sheep) to the spinner, who carded it by hand, spun and wound it on bobbins, then it was reweighed and turned over to the dyers. From thence on it was immediately under the supervision of the mistress of the house who selected the various colors and caused it to be dyed in her presence; then the weavers took it and wove it into almost every kind of cloth; black, blue, red, plaids, mixed etc., fine cloth for under wear and heavy for outer wear.



Carpets were not made of rags for the planters floors as is generally believed, but were woven of wool; and most durable and pretty they were. One in the loom was an interesting sight, the striped warp, the large roll of completed cloth and the the complicated maze of shuttles filled with brilliant wools. The patterns were selected and the number of threads each way as well as every detail of its fabrication, were planned by the mistress. I have appended in pocket a few sample of cloths made in the Tower Hill looms.

On certain days in the year the mistress collected her cutters and the servants came in and were measured under her supervision; the clothing was then cut and made up by the seamstresses who worked upon them the year round. The shoemaker, under supervision of the overseers, kept them shod, as well as making all the harness used on the plantation. Their summer hats were made by platters and gloves and stockings by knitters.

The Poultry was in itself a large industry and required much care, there was between 80 and 100 milk white geese to start with, they were profitable as well as ornamental, each one yielded about a pound of feathers annually, and, as they were white, they brought a high price. Those that hatched out black or gray were eaten as soon as they were grown, this gave two or three hundred a year for the table and market. They kept the place alive with their constant outcries. The guinea fowl, 30 or 40 in number, likewise added to the liveliness with their constant cackling. The half dozen or so of peacocks were kept purely for ornament and for their feathers which were used for fly

brushes. The ducks, about 30 or 40, were kept for table alone and the chickens for table and eggs. I do not like to hazard an estimate of the number of the latter, but there must have been between 100 and 200 breeders, for there were seven hen houses besides scores of hovels for separate broods; how many were hatched out and had their necks wrung in the course of a year has probably never been estimated. Chicken was a favorite dish, fried, soup, roasted or in pie, and was rarely absent from the table. The flock of turkeys usually numbered 40 or 50.

All the poultry, except the geese, guinea fowl and turkeys, were locked up at night and counted every morning when let out - The geese and guinea fowl made so much noise if molested and the turkeys roosted in such lofty trees as to be out of danger from prowling darkies.

The work of the plantation was pretty evenly divided between its master and mistress. To the former fell the management and discipline of the slaves; the surveying and mapping of field with plans for ditching and draining; the general direction of the planting, cultivation and harvesting of crops; the preparation and distribution of manure; the care of the stock; the repairing of the wear and tear on buildings, bridges, levees etc.; the making of brandies and the government paper work pertaining thereto; the management of the mill, collections of tolls and rents, keeping accounts etc.

He was assisted by his overseer, who in 1861 was a William Whitehead. What he was paid I do not know, but Nicholas Burt in 1837 received wages \$200, a single man, no stint of meat and bread, he took 470 pounds of pork for his years supply, a woman to cook, wash etc., a horse for his exclusive use, a cow for milk. The overseer was executive officer and carried out the orders of the master.

The mistress of the plantation was burdened with even more multifarious duties; the physical comfort and welfare of all the slaves fell to her care, and the majority of the women on the place worked under her immediate orders. To accomplish her herculean task, she had a large and well drilled staff; the head cook followed her to the various store-rooms daily, when the meals for the day were weighed or measured out by her and minute instructions given regarding the preparations; certain women came in pickling or preserving season to

stew, skim and mix; others presented themselves for soap, wax, tallow or lard making, all of which she personally superintended. The large number of fowls were carefully listed by her and not a hen set but the day of the event was noted in a book as well as marked on each egg; she was in every poultry house on the plantation at least once every day.

The rations for the entire farm were issued under her supervision and the making of cloth and clothing was under her direction. When the sick had been visited, the house inspected, the servants breakfast shut off, the dishes, plates etc., washed, the meals for the day weighed out, the cotton and wool allotted to the spinners, the poultry all inspected and counted, the looms inspected and the weavers instructed, if there was no lard or tallow to try, no wool to be dyed, preserves or pickles to make or honey to strain, she would take her place in the hall with from two to six seamstresses about her and see to the clothing of her family.

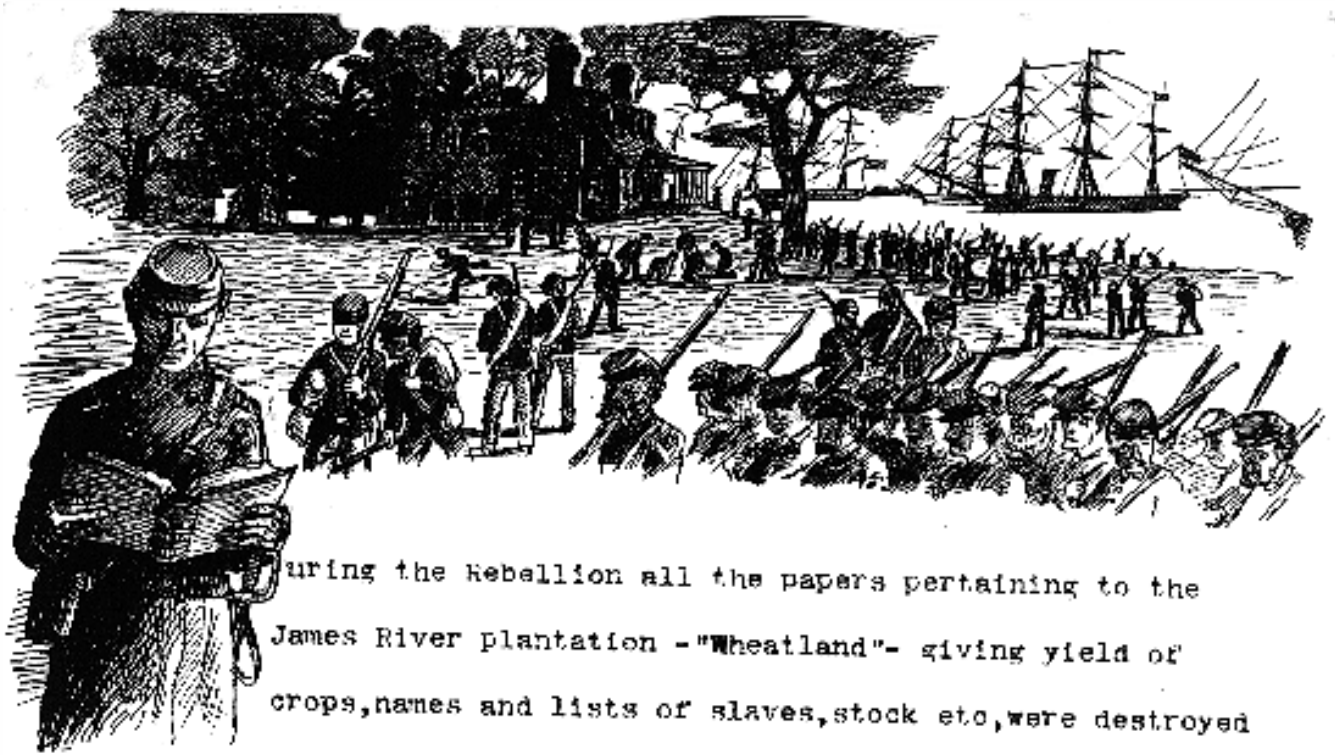
It seems incredible that one woman could do this, and yet she did, and more, for during the war, Lavinia Blow [Lavinia Cargil Blow] not only did her part of the work but her absent husbands too. Besides clothing and feeding the large family (numbering over 30) that the war had driven to Tower Hill, she sent off great boxes to the soldiers, nursed her wounded nephews who were continually turning up with bullets in their skins, paid the taxes, rented lands, and managed the entire farm in such a way that it not only carried its increased burden but furnished large quantities of forage and provisions for the starving army in which her husband fought.

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During the Rebellion all the papers pertaining to the James River plantation - "Wheatland" - giving yield of crops, names and lists of slaves, stock etc., were destroyed

Slaves & Crops

During the rebellion all the papers pertaining to the James River plantation - Wheatland - giving yield of crops, names and lists of slaves, stock etc., were destroyed by General McClelland [sic] on his march up the James against Richmond in 1862; and most of those belonging to the Tower Hill plantation were rendered illegible by moisture while they lay buried with the other valuables to prevent them [from] falling into the hands of the Federals. I have not therefore been enabled to get an exact list of the slaves belonging to the estate in 1861. Such memoranda as remain however show there were about 250 [*], of whom 120 were at Tower Hill and 75 at the James River plantation. Those of the older records of Tower Hill were of no value, so instead of being buried during the rebellion, they were packed away in the loft; some of them I have appended while others I have seen but have been unable to obtain.

[*] *This number is confirmed by William Blow who managed Tower Hill and the Olde Place in 1861.*

They show that Richard Blow deeded to his son George in 1811, 34 slaves; to this number George constantly added and in 1832 he owned 123, distributed as follows - Tower Hill and mill 77, the Olde Place (Southampton) 20, James River plantation and Portsmouth 26. This is the last record that we have of the slaves at James River and the Olde Place, but in 1837, Farm Book, shows the Tower Hill slaves employed as follows: Cooper 1, shoemaker 1, house servants 8 (men 2, women 6), foremen (who also worked in the fields) 2, herders 5, gardener 1, cow-driver 1, plowmen 11, ox-cart drivers 3, boys with ox-carts 3, gin work boys 3, carpenters 2, miller 1, blacksmiths (worked also in the fields when not engaged in shop) 2, carriage driver 1, seamstress (in house) 2, weavers 2, dairy maid 1, cooks 2, spinners 13, field hands 8, washerwomen 1, general work 7; this list does not include about a dozen unassigned children over 12, who were learning their trades in the kitchen, laundry, shops, residence, fields etc. Besides the above there were a matter of 35 (as near as I can learn) too old or too young to work. This aggregate of 121 was about a fair compliment for the plantation, and, with slight fluctuations, remained constant until 1861.

Since I have already quoted from the records of 1837, and as the plantation papers regarding stock, crops etc. of later dates were destroyed as explained above, I will continue to cite from the same authority:

There were 12 horses, 11 mules, 124 sheep, 322 hogs, wheat crop produced 112 bushels, sweet potatoes about 1000 bushels, corn 546 barrels. (there must be some mistake about this item, as it is totally inadequate to supply a plantation of the size of Tower Hill, and is altogether out of keeping with the stock and other crops, besides being far short of crops raised in later years, it is evident that the corn raised on the Island and Butts was not included, the yield from these fields alone was from 500 to 1000 barrels). Of turnips it states: A plenty of turnips throughout the winter and spring, for fattening hogs, beeves [sic], sheep, milch cows and for cooking. Of the brandy: This was a very bad fruit year, it was blasted in the early spring, my crop made about six barrels of brandy, of peaches there was not a single ripe one on the whole estate, hence no brandy (the brandy crop varied from 5 to 60 barrels). Peas; a patch was planted on the Island from which about 20 bushels were gathered, besides a plenty to eat etc. - 62 acres were pitched in cotton.

In 1860 the yield of the plantation was about the same as that given above - In that year it produced as follows [*]: Corn 1000 barrels, sweet potatoes 500 bushels, cotton 25 bales, brandy 30 barrels, wheat 1000 bushels, hogs killed 200, sheep on place 150, cattle 75.

[*] *Statement of William Blow, Sr., who managed the plantation in 1860.*

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The Garden & Kitchen

The garden was situated just in rear of the house and was cut off from it by a dense boxwood hedge about twelve feet in height. A brick walk led from the back door to the gate and pierced this hedge at its center. The garden covered just one acre of ground and was literally a wilderness of sweets, a portion was laid off in circular walks and beds and devoted exclusively to the culture of flowers, while all the walks had borders on each side; in fact flowers grew in great profusion everywhere and were in countless varieties. Growing along the walks were also large rose bushes of every species and other flower bearing shrubs.

At the junction of the four main walks was a large summer house fitted with cool seats and covered with sweet jasmine and honey suckle, and a similar one further down, at its four corners grew large boxwood trees, and over the walks from the entrances of these summer houses extended long arbors covered with grape vines which bore the most delicious fruit. In the north end of the garden were terraces, along which grew an abundance of lilies of different colors. The boundary of the garden was marked by rows of cherry and peach trees of choice varieties, while figs, pears, currants, raspberries, strawberries, gooseberries and quinces, and every kind of vegetable,

grew within its limits.

The kitchen was about thirty yards from the home and to its side and rear. This distance was thought necessary a hundred or two years ago to avoid the smell incident to the cooking and the noise produced by the army of servants kept in those days. It was in a frame house about fifty feet long, one end of which was used as the weaving room, leaving a large compartment, thirty by twenty feet, for cooking. It differed materially from a modern kitchen or even one of the later half of the last century; in one end was a doorway closed by two half doors; during the day, be it rain or shine, the upper half was always open, this was necessary for the admission of light and also to supply air for the gigantic chimney and fireplace; the whole door would have stood open, which would have further improved the light and draught, but for the hungry dogs that hung incessantly around this paradise of savory odors. It was closed by a latch on the inside, which was opened from the outside by reaching over the door.



At the opposite end of the room was an enormous fireplace ten feet wide, five feet high and four feet deep, so that one could walk into it by nodding his head and look at the sky out of the chimney. Across the fireplace and about six feet above the hearth was a large iron rod, on this hung the pot hooks, hangers, and various contrivances from which were suspended great iron pots, kettles, and all kinds of utensils now obsolete. Baking was done in ovens placed in the fire, on the lids of which hot coals and embers were placed. Along the sides of the room ran long tables for the preparation of food, above these were shelves, and under them buckets, tubs, baskets etc.



The culinary staff consisted of a chief [sic], probably between 45 and 55, an assistant, about 30 or 40, and an apprentice or scullion from 15 to 20 years of age; there were also one or two old cooks who only came in during a press of work from company, or during the Christmas cooking or some other special occasion, these veterans of the oven and skillet generally presided over the pastries and other matters that required great experience and skill. It can well be imagined that bringing in dinner was quite a task and required some little generalship and cooperation on the part of the head cook and butler, owing to the greatness of the distance that it had to be carried; but the system also made this practicable, as the same generous allowance of workers existed in the dining room as in the kitchen, and although the covers were many they always came in hot, borne by a little army of white-aproned, black-faced domestics. At first thought the fireplace and general arrangements may strike one as unnecessarily large, but when the number of utensils necessary to cook in so primitive a method for a large southern family and its guests is considered, it is readily seen that all and more might be required.

The Virginia idea of living was generous too in those days; more meats, vegetables and breads than are commonly seen not at a meal were thought necessary - For Breakfast the family would sit down to egg-bread, hot rolls, beaten (sometimes called Maryland biscuits, eggs, possibly a meat and a relish, and honey and coffee; at dinner, soup, fish or game, a roast of meat, fowl or one of the many ways of preparing pork, fried chicken, a hot old Virginia ham and a half dozen or more vegetables (sweet potatoes were a standing dish and were on

the table 365 days in the year); supper resembled breakfast, thin biscuits and preserves being added, while no meats except a relish appeared.

The summers were warm and long and as the ice crop was usually small and uncertain, it became necessary to so cure meat that it would keep in defiance of the climate. Thus, after years of experimenting, was evolved the famous Virginia ham, which, from the amount of labor entailed in its curing and the modern facilities for refrigerating fresh meat, has almost disappeared except at the tables of epicures. Cut from hogs fattened on corn exclusively, it was treated with salt and spices for a month or more, then it was smoked for months, after which it hung two or three years, the longer the better, before it was eaten. It was never absent from the table and is the most delicious dish I ever tasted. [*Smithfield hams are made from hogs fattened on peanuts; Westphalian, sugar-beet mash; Prosciutto, chestnuts; Parma, cheese whey. Ed*]

Whatever else may be said of Antebellum Virginia I do not believe that its cooking, its pickles and preserves, have ever been surpassed, for here, as in everything else, they possessed the science of enjoyment.

About sixty yards from the house were the two offices. They were simply cottages and used to catch the overflow of guests from the main house, one was situated under the branches of the Old Oak, it consisted of three large rooms and three closets, one being upstairs; the other contained two rooms and two closets.

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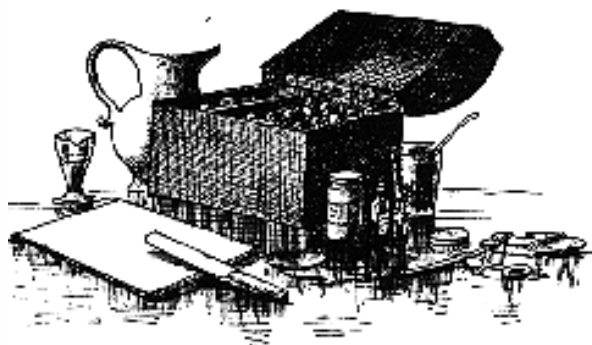


he sick fell to the care of the mistress of the house, and they could not have been in more tender hands; one of her first duties in the morning was to drive around to the various hamlets, visit and prescribe for all that her

The sick fell to the care of the mistress of the house, and they could not have been in more tender hands; one of her first duties in the morning was to drive around to the various hamlets, visit and prescribe for all that her note book showed to be indisposed, if any were seriously ill a messenger was dispatched for the doctor who lived about eight miles off. After supper, as soon as the things were cleared away, her old black leather medicine chest was set before her and out came her note book, she then proceeded to put up medicines for distribution on her mornings round the next day. With the experience gained in this way together with the teaching of her mother - for she, like her slaves, had served an apprenticeship at her trade - she became very expert in the treatment of most complaints.

Their Sabbath mornings were spent at church when one of their number preached, the afternoons by the young people in singing and playing such games as still amuse white children - clapping in and clapping out, Miss Jennie Jones etc. The old fashioned darkey was a happy mortal and a great dancer but he was also very religious, so there arose a conflict of conscience and pleasure. Darkeys are human however, they therefore solved the problem and quieted their consciences in the good old human way - by drawing nice distinctions - no member of the church could dance, but no amount of capering was dancing unless at some time or other the legs crossed. The number of complicated steps, and the amount of enjoyment to the strains of the banjo, that a good church member could extract from a regular old breakdown without crossing his legs was marvelous. Their life seemed to agree with them for they often lived to a great age. I find this entry in one of Georges records: There were old Patty,

upwards of 100; Hector, nearly 100; Old Sharper, over 90; Flanders, over 80; and several women whose names I do not recollect were from 60 to 90.



Before completing this sketch I must give a brief history of one of the families of the Tower Hill Negroes, the women of which illustrate in a remarkable degree the system of hereditary service already referred to. This family is conspicuous, not so much for the employment of its daughters in one capacity generation after generation, but on account of the high esteem in which that employment (they were ladies maids) was held. Their intimate association with their mistresses preserving their pedigree while families of equal length of service - but of less confidential occupations - are long since forgotten.

With the property and slaves received by Mrs. Eliza Blow - wife of Colonel George Blow - from her father, Robert Hall Waller, were her maid and her maids mother. Coming from Williamsburg - the center of Virginia learning and fashion - and having occupied for generations posts of honor and confidence, these Negroes speedily acquired a prestige among their County associates, which earned for them the half-serious, half-derisive title of the Royal Family. Mam Sally, the first of this illustrious race which tradition has preserved, was maid to Mrs. Blows Grandmother, Miss Bettie, daughter of Charles Hungerford and wife of Dr. John Camm, a graduate of Oxford and President of William and Mary College [*]. Her daughter, Mam Fannie, became the maid to Mrs. Blows mother, the daughter of John and Bettie Camm, and wife of Robert Hall Waller. In this capacity she had attended her young mistress, Miss Nancy Camm, to all the social functions incident to her day and her fathers official position, the glories of these past splendors Mam Fannie never tired of describing to her little masters and mistresses (children of Eliza

and George Blow).

[*] *The position of ladies maid in that remote era was one of much importance, as only by long practice could the necessary skill be acquired to dress hair after the extravagant fashion of the times.*

Harriet, one of Fannies daughters, was the maid to Miss Eliza Waller, whom she accompanied to Tower Hill on her marriage with Colonel Blow, and there, in addition to her hereditary duties, she acted as grand vizier and assistant housekeeper; while her sister, Aunt Matilda, was nurse in succession to all the children of Eliza and George Blow during their infancy. Harriets daughter Sallie next became the maid to Eliza Blows eldest daughter Emma (Mrs. Dr. Blacknall), and Sallies daughter Annette was maid to Emma Blacknalls eldest daughter Lizzie (Mrs. Captain James Peagram), which brings us to the rebellion, and leaves Miss Lucy Peagram, daughter of Lizzie (now a charming young lady) to dress her own hair, and Annettes daughter, if she had the caste pride so strong in her race, is probably dressing some other young ladys hair who is able to pay for it.

Thus we see that for five generations in succession daughter followed mother in their service on daughter and mother. Few families - white or black - have occupied for so many years the topmost position of that station in which it has pleased God to call them, and it is not surprising if they stood without equal in their office, or were dubbed the Royal Family by their associates. And so pride of birth and honorably spent lives will assert themselves, be the birth or service high or low, white or black.

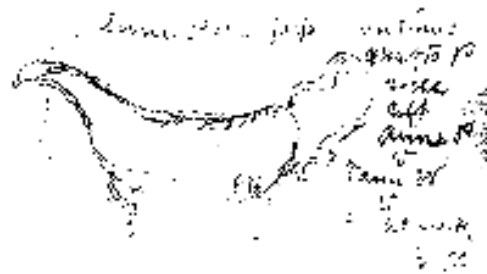
Below is a translation in the form of a genealogical table of the above somewhat confused sketch:

Sallie maid to Bettie Wingerford who married John Cann.					
Fannie	"	"	Nancy Cann	"	" Robert Hall Waller.
Matilda	Harriet	"	Eliza Waller	"	" George Blow.
Nurse					
Sallie	"	"	Kenna Blow	"	" Geo. Blacknall, U.S.N
Annette	"	"	Lizzie Blacknall	"	" Jas. W. Peagram, U.S.N
Lucy Peagram - No maid.					



*Some of Silver taken away from
Jas Rvr - Waller*

"Some of Silver taken away from
Jas Rvr (Wheatland) - Waller"



Every week rations were weighed out and issued to the slaves: so many noggins of meal, so many pounds of meat, so much molasses, vinegar, soap, salt, pepper, peas, potatoes and other vegetables - all these were the product of their labor except the salt. They were far better lodged, fed and clothed than the average laborer is now, or the mechanic of their day. Each family had a cabin to itself; those of the field hands were built of logs, while the foreman, mechanics and house servants lived in frame cottages. Nearly all had their gardens, and were allowed time to cultivate them. They also had their poultry and possessed the monopoly of making and selling to their masters door-mats, baskets (of which vast numbers were used about the plantation) straw hats and other articles, the making of which required special ingenuity; these were fabricated in their own time, and fair prices were paid for them. In this way they sometimes made enough to buy their freedom.



The treatment of the slaves was kindly, and they were devoted to their masters. Their lives work began - as I have said before - at twelve, that is, they were about their work at that age though they did not seriously enter on it until older. After reaching fifty, less labor was required of them and many indulgences given, and their work gradually grew lighter until at sixty or sixty-five they were retired altogether. They were treated with perfect respect by all, especially by the children, who were never allowed to use the word Negro, to which they strongly objected; they [preferred to be] called servant instead. The older ones were invariably addressed as uncle and aunt.



Their marriages were duly and regularly solemnized and all immorality among them checked. The family always attended their funerals, and I can see now the sad procession of dusky mourners slowly wending their way with their weird chant to the graveyard as they followed one of their number to his last resting place.

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he farther low grounds and fresh grounds lay just beyond the lime spring, they were a succession of broad low fields between the uplands and the Nottoway and were subject to its overflow until reclaimed by levees.

The Low Grounds

The farther low grounds and fresh grounds lay just beyond the lime spring. They were a succession of broad low fields between the uplands and the Nottoway and were subject to its overflow until reclaimed by levees. These embankments (including those that protected other fields) extended for about two miles along the banks of the river, and varied in height from two to ten feet, and in width at their base from eight to thirty feet.

The water from the hills in rear of the fields was conducted around them, but that which bubbled up in springs on their surface could not be so disposed of, as the outlets would have been inlets for the rivers flood; nor could they be dammed back, since the freshets often lasted for days or even weeks, during which time sufficient water would have accumulated to have done much damage. A carefully planned system of drains, both open and blind, were therefore prepared, these drains conducted the waters to large ponds or reservoirs near the

levees, where it was stored until the floods subsided, when it was discharged into the channel through gates which worked automatically. These gates were operated by nicely adjusted floats which shut them when the water in the river reached a certain point and threatened to overflow the fields, the reservoirs were then closed and received only the drainage from the fields. When the river receded to its proper channel, the floats opened the gates and the water collected in the ponds was liberated and escaped into the river - In these ponds were many duck, beaver, mink etc.

Marl for fertilizing purposes was obtained from a hill of that name, which overhung the Nottoway and was just above the low grounds. There were two ways of conveying it to the various parts of the plantation - Large lighters or barges (see Farm Book, page) were moored at the base of the hill, the marl was mined and cast into them, they were then cast loose and drifted down the stream to the lower low grounds, fresh grounds and island fields, when the marl was distributed in ox carts. For the home tract the lighters were towed a short distance upstream, the marl unloaded and placed in cars and hauled over a tramway for about three quarters of a mile to the upland fields, when it was distributed as above. The tramway ran along railroad branch which skirted the house hill.



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etween the present residence and the marl hill is another interesting spot, which, like the low grounds just described, contains the relics of a deserted habitation, with the difference however, that instead of being in an

The Ruins of House Hill

Between the present residence and the marl hill is another interesting spot, which, like the low grounds just described, contains the relics of a deserted habitation, with the difference however, that instead of being in an open field it is on a hill covered by a dense forest.

It was the original Tower Hill, but when the residence was removed in 1775 to its present site the name went with it, and the old site was called House Hill after the ruins that marked its summit. The forest that envelopes it is very beautiful in the warm months, with its great trees, brilliant flowers and carpet of moss, but one would never imagine that it covered what was once broad fields and spreading lawns; the only thing remaining to indicate which are a few scattered brick, an old well, and the traditions that have been handed down by the Negroes.

Whether it was that their sense of the supernatural was awakened by those silent forests which shrouded a place once animated by long forgotten people, or whether its former tenants did those things which they ought not to have done and the story of their misdeeds was handed down and gave birth to these mysterious legends, will never be known; long lives were lived out on old house hill, many old Blows, African slaves and indented whites were born, lived and died there; it was probably purchased with the blood of its former owners and may have been so retained. Its broad fields hummed with the toil

of long forgotten slaves, and its manor house rang with song and jest of the gay old life of the past, what they thought, or said, or did in all those years that they spent there, nothing is left to show; but that these woods are haunted and peopled by goblins that, on dark nights, lead rash hunters to destruction and send dogs slinking and whimpering to their masters heels, is firmly believed. Stories are whispered of spirits that stalk amid these shades with frightful mien and lead belated wayfarers into bottomless swamps that have no existence by day, and of dogs that have treed coons in these depths, but, when the trees were felled, instead of the game, great monsters rushed out with shrieks and wails.

The location of the old house was excellent, it was on a high hill and at its back was the cleared site of the Nottoway village ready for the plow, while, a half mile to its left were the low lands of the fresh grounds, and in its front the uplands stretched indefinitely, giving abundant promise of rich harvests. In this direction the lane (its traces still remain) led to the public road.

But here was the difficulty, as the surrounding country became settled, its topography asserted itself, for the plantation was on a peninsular [sic] formed by the Nottoway on the East and Raccoon Swamp with Turkey Pen Island on its south, it was this that caused the removal of the house to the present site, and left House Hill to ghosts and deer. The path that traversed these forests forked in its center and one of its haunches led to the lime spring, which was a favorite destination for Sunday rambles, the spring itself formed a limpid pool of cool, clear, water which escaped over rocks and pebbles to the river; around it was a broad carpet of the softest moss, while the whole was shaded by a number of large beech. On the trunks of these trees, names have been cut for generations, until they have become a register of all the gay parties that have visited this spot; the dates are usually cut under the names and the entire party enclosed in a square, so but little effort of memory is required to recall the circumstance and allow the mind to slip back into the past; some of the dates extend back 50 years but those older cannot be deciphered as they grew out with the bark.

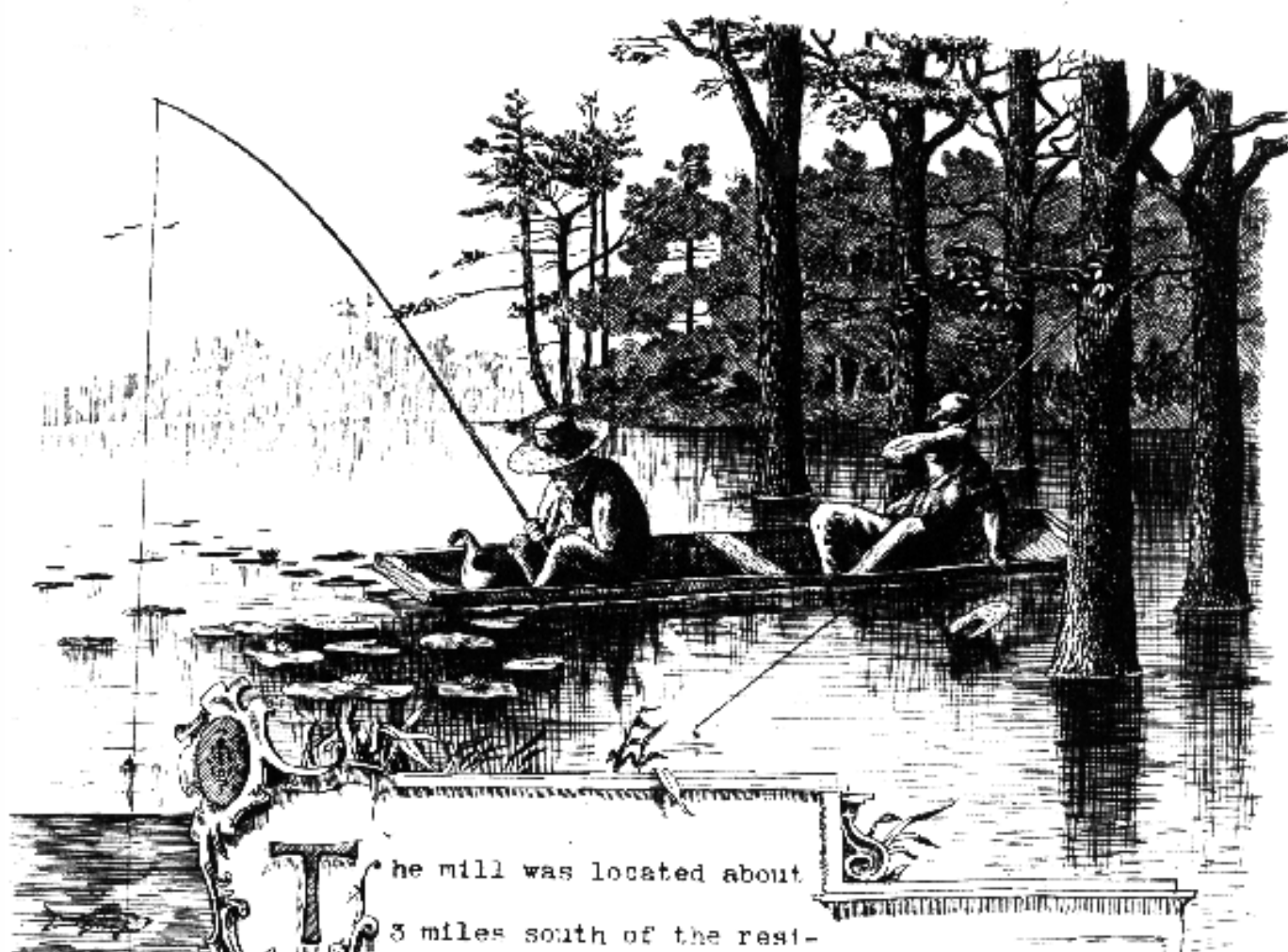
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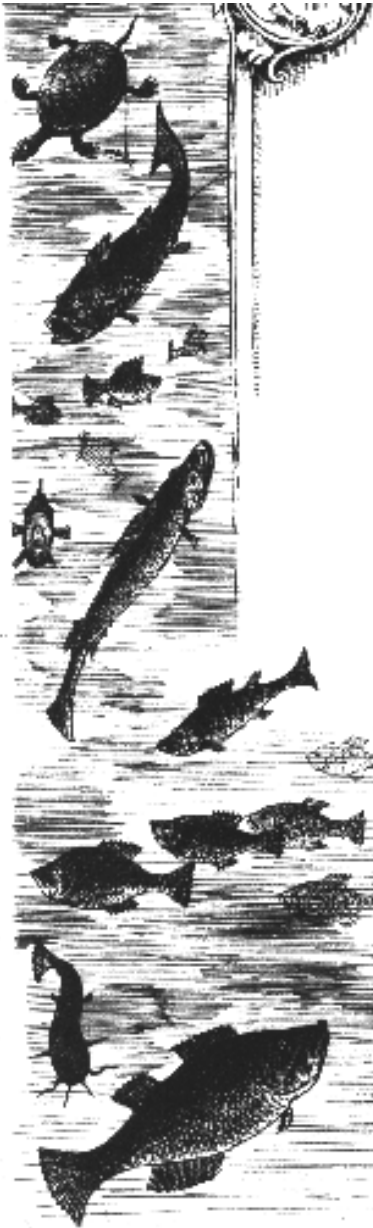
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The Mill



The Mill was located about three miles South of the residence and was quite an imposing structure with its improved bolting and sifting appliances. It ground both corn and wheat, and had a monopoly in the latter as there were only two or three flour mills in the county. It was attended by a white haired miller and a Negro assistant, and not only ground for the plantation but for the farmers for many miles around, for which a toll was charged. A head, or depth of water of about 20 feet being necessary to insure the required power for a mill of this description, the swamp (Raccoon) on which it was situated was crossed by an embankment of a half mile in length and a maximum section of 20 feet width at its summit, 100 feet at its base and 25 feet in height.



The stream thus dammed formed a beautiful lake over a mile and a half wide in places and five miles in length; its banks were lined with a lofty and dense forest, which, cutting off the winds, left its surface as smooth as glass, while its limpid waters were dyed a dark black by falling leaves.

The upper end of the millpond was grown up with gum trees and presented the appearance of a submerged forest. It was stocked with a variety of fish - chub, a species of large-mouth black bass, weighing as high as twelve pounds, freckle (sometimes called strawberry bass) from a foot to eighteen inches long and weighing from one to three pounds; pike, raccoon perch, sun perch and a variety of other species.

The chub is fished for with a bob or large fly made of deer tail; the fisherman sits in the bow of the boat, which is slowly guided among the gums by a man in the stern, the boat glides noiselessly in and out among the trees until a monster chub darts out from his hiding place beneath a sunken log, there is a great splash and a lurch, a shout of back her, a violent struggle followed by a scuffle in the boat, and the black monster lays flapping in its bottom with the handle of a paddle thrust through its gills, a few murmured comments on its size and the boat continues its stealthy windings while the glistening bob again flashes over the black water.

Yellow perch fishing is a tame affair and engaged in from the banks or dam with worms for bait. Angling for freckle however required great skill and judgment and is good sport when the fish are hungry, if everything is favorable and the bait to their taste (river minnows caught with great care and transported four miles, with constant changes of water, for they are very delicate) they begin to bite and then for an hour or two the sport is fine; the fish being game and plucky often test to its extreme limit the strength of the best rod; reels cannot be used in millponds on account of the amount of brush, roots etc., that line its bottom.



The stream on which the mill is located, after passing through cypress swamps and tangled thickets, sometimes winding and twisting, sometimes spreading out and filling its low grounds with a network of small channels, finally divides into two main branches which reach the Nottoway more than a mile apart, leaving an island between. Of these, the north branch behaves itself fairly well for a swamp of Tidewater Virginia, that is, it generally confines itself to two or three channels, and its low grounds are in places only two or three hundred yards wide, with points where a cart can approach its banks.

At one of these a bridge was built and access obtained to the large insular field between these forks. But the south branch defies description. It has no channel, for it is separated onto a maze of tangles and sluggish lagoons, forming innumerable low islands and shallow ponds, while all is covered with a thick jungle of vines, cypress knees and brambles and is so dark that perpetual night seems to have settled on it. It is only by certain paths that the swamp can be penetrated at all, and then only by hunters in very long and dry spells of weather. It abounds with game of all kinds and is known as Turkey Pen island.

The remainder of the island was distinguished from this swampy waste by the appellation of the Island field, the soil was very rich and adapted to the cultivation of almost everything common to the climate; a garden was cultivated there (Farm Book- page) and 1500 barrels of corn have been raised in a single year. Butts communicated with the island by the bridge above mentioned and its soil much resembled that of the Island field. These two tracts, owing to their size and their remoteness from the headquarters of the plantation, formed in a measure a separate farm and in many particulars was independent of the plantation proper; they were ordinarily cared for by a foreman who lived on the Island and a force of Negroes also had their cabins there and at Butts and assisted in their cultivation; at certain seasons of the year when much labor was required, it was sent from the old field

End

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About the Author

William Nivison Blow, Jr. was born at Tower Hill, Sussex County, Virginia on August 11, 1855, the son of Captain William Nivison Blow, CSA, and Lavinia Cargill. He graduated from the Virginia Military Institute with high honors in 1876 and for some years devoted himself to the practice of civil engineering.

He was appointed second lieutenant 15th Infantry, Oct. 20, 1884. He served with his regiment at Fort Randall Dakota till 1890; Fort Sheridan Ill till 1896. He acted as adjutant general of the troops engages in suppressing the riots in Chicago, Ill. in 1894. He was commended in General Orders No. 33 Headquarters of the Army, for "courage and prompt energy in rescuing, at the peril of his life, a young man from drowning in Lake Michigan, near Fort Sheridan."

He served for four years as adjutant quartermaster of the 15th Infantry.

He was serving at Fort Bayard, NM, when he was appointed 1898 a major of the 4th Virginia volunteers, with which he served in Cuba till Jan. 11 1900, when the regiment was mustered out. He was first lieutenant in the Regular Army at this time, and by a singular coincidence his father and grandfather had served in the 4th as first lieutenants. He was disbursing officer of the Cuban census till Feb. 1901. He was promoted Captain in 1899 and served with his company in the relief expedition in China in 1900 where he went with his regiment to the Philippines, where he served till 1902. He returned to the US in 1902 and was stationed at Monterey, CA at the time of his retirement Nov. 25, 1905, for disability in the line of duty."

He married Mary Elizabeth Thomas (27 May 1863 - 4 November 1943) daughter of General H.G. Thomas and Ellen Webster in Denver Colorado October 27 1882. They had one child, William Thomas Blow (1883-1943).

Major William Nivison Blow died at Sarah Leigh Hospital , Norfolk, Va., Oct. 28, 1907 at age 52 following an operation for appendicitis.

Notes on Tower Hill:

Richard Blow, who bought Tower Hill, never lived there. The house he built in 1775 was for an overseer. For reasons we do not know, he sent his son George and his society wife Eliza Waller to run the plantation. They both *hated* it. They were so convinced that the place was unhealthy, he wrote his son, "that some wicked creature [must put] poison in your wells". As soon as his children could walk they were sent to Portsmouth to live with their grandparents.

After his wife's death the Colonel turned over the management to his son William Nivison Blow Sr. [the author's father] and left Tower Hill, living at Wheatland on the James River and in Norfolk. He returned during the Rebellion - Sussex was little involved in the war and his son was away fighting with the Sussex Light Dragoons.

Colonel George Blow died intestate. His son William Nivison Blow, Sr., received the plantation in a court-ordered division [it seems nobody else wanted it].

William Nivison Blow, Sr., also died intestate. It was divided among five of his children who all sold their interests to William Nivison Blow Jr. A professional soldier, it appears he never lived there after childhood (his brother George ran the plantation). When he died it passed to his wife Mary Elizabeth Thomas.

"Mary Elizabeth Thomas Blow died intestate on November 4, 1943, the property descending to her Granddaughter Elizabeth Blow Jurgeson as her sole heir at law, the said Elizabeth Blow Jurgeson being the sole child of William Thomas Blow, the said William T. Blow being the deceased son and sole child of Mary Elizabeth Blow. [Tower Hill title abstract]

Elizabeth Blow Jurgeson sold Tower Hill in 1960 and moved to California where she died in 1983. The bulk of the land was sold to Union Bag Camp, a paper manufacturer.

The 50 acre parcel described above as "[House Hill](#)" a.k.a. "Marl Hill" or simply "The Hill", believed to be the first home of the Blows in Virginia, was sold to a cousin, George Waller Blow, of Yorktown, Virginia. It is now [2000] owned by his nine grandchildren which means it has remained in the family for almost 400 years.

The "manor house" was used as a hunting lodge for several years by the paper company and then donated to the National Trust for Historic Preservation which restricted the deed and resold the property in 1976 to John W. Bell of Chesapeake, Va. who has no connection to the Blow family. When last seen by the Editor in 1992 the property and formal garden were completely overgrown with kudzu and the house itself in sad disrepair.



Tower Hill in 1992
A large addition on the rear is not visible.

For quite a different aspect of the plantation, i.e. Tower Hill *after* the Rebellion, find Johnny Reb and Billy Yank by Alexander Hunter [Colonel George Blow's grandson]; 1905 Neal Publishing Co. N.Y. Chapter XXIV - *A typical Virginia Plantation* could be titled Hard Times at Tower Hill. Here you will find Major William Nivison Blow plowing the fields with his old war horse. But he did it with *style*.

Today, Sussex County has fewer inhabitants than it did before the Revolution [not to be confused with Rebellion]. Most of the land is now being used to grow trees for paper pulp (and clearcut from time to time). Over half of the county's citizens are "residents" of several Virginia State prisons that have recently been built in this forgotten county. [Ed.]

Notes from the Editor:

The original document was crudely typed on legal size paper, never published and never bound. Some pages were obviously missing and the chapters were in no special order. I have assembled them to make the most sense as I see it. Note that the beautiful pen and ink drawings were done on the proof pages. These were scanned from a Xerox copy of the original kindly provided by Margaret Cook at Swem Library's Special Collections. My thanks to her for this and all

the very dedicated attention she gives to both Blows and the huge Blow archive at William and Mary [a great part of this archive came from the attics of Tower Hill when Mrs. Jurgeson sold the property].

John Matthiessen Blow
Fort Lauderdale Florida
August 1, 2000

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